

THE BUSINESS, TECHNOLOGY & ART OF ANIMATION

May
2006

ANIMATIONTM

MAGAZINE

**The Hidden
Gems of
MIPTV**



**Taming
Disney's
The Wild**

**It's [adult swim]'s
World: We Only Live in It!**

www.animationmagazine.net

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ATOM
ALPHA TEENS ON MACHINES
SEASON 2

3 TO SEE



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ANIMATION/KIDS/TWEENS

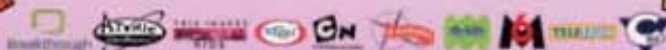
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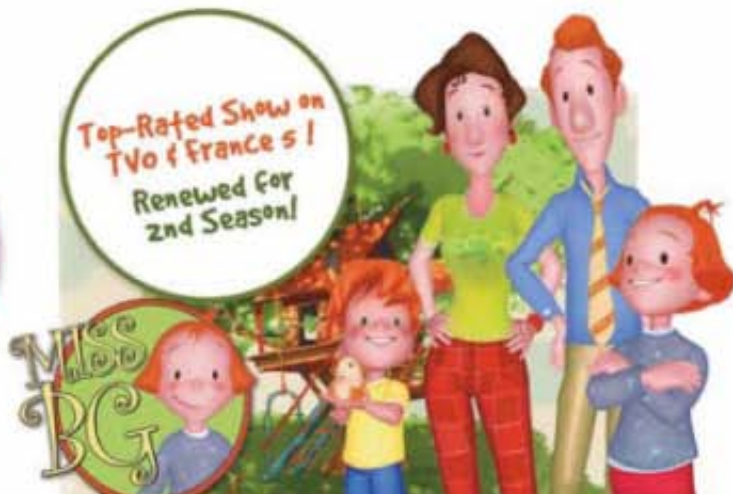
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2nd Season!**



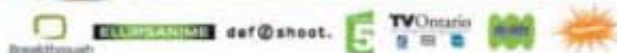
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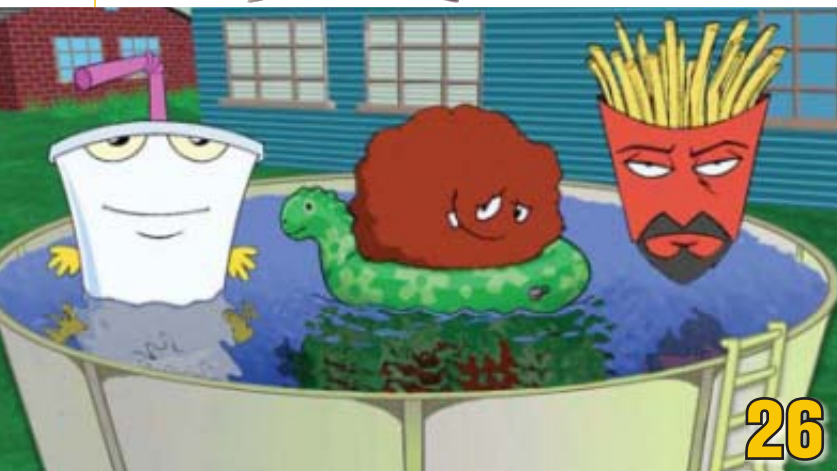
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On the Cover:

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They say April is the cruelest month, but for the folks working in the animation business, it may also be the busiest this year. On the big screen, Fox/Blue Sky's *Ice Age 2: The Meltdown* will be duking it out with Disney's latest CG-animated feature, *The Wild*. It will certainly be interesting to see how audiences respond to these spring offerings.

On the TV front, we just got word that Fox TV has renewed both *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill*. Fans will probably have mixed feelings about this latest development. We all like our favorite toons to go out in grand style, in a flash of glory. Nobody likes a show that has overstayed its welcome and exhausted all its possibilities and fresh ideas. On the other hand, it's always great to have animation alive and kicking in primetime.

If you happen to attend the MIPTV market in France this month or the NAB convention in Las Vegas, you'll notice that a lot of attention is being devoted to preparing for the next big e-wave. Podcasting, High-Def TV, digital cinema, mobile TV and video and a lot of other hot new tech applications are competing for consumers' time and short attention spans. Everyone seems to be wondering about the financial rewards of the new platforms and how to handle the rights for future projects. We are just hoping just as much time is going to be spent on making sure good stories are being told on those small screens. Most of us would still rather see our favorite Disney or Miyazaki movies on the biggest theatrical screens you can find on this planet. For the moment, the new platforms are perfect for funny little shorts such as clever clips from the *Wonder Showzen* series (which just began its outrageous second season on MTV2).

Here at the magazine, we have two great announcements. We're very lucky to have vfx maestro Todd Sheridan Perry join the team as our new technology reviewer. Todd has an amazing background in the vfx industry and we're thrilled to have him write for us on a monthly basis. Also, our award-winning contributor Barbara Robertson launches a brand new feature this month. Her new column is called *Cause & Effect*, and she'll be writing about cool vfx tricks she uncovers in TV series, commercials, shorts and features. Regardless of the medium, she'll be describing glorious acts of digital ingenuity. These are only some of the ways we hope to make April a bit kinder for our readers.



Ramin

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Quote of the Month



"He is an amalgam of a thousand morons that we've all dealt with in our lives, starting with the lackey at the D.M.V. and all the way up to Dick Cheney,"

—Peter Girardi, co-creator of [adult swim's] *Minority Report*, discussing the show's villain, White Shadow, in a *New York Times* interview.

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26 x 30 mins



The Animation Planner

May

FRAME-BY-FRAME

2 A fresh batch of spring DVDs arrive in stores: You can get your hands on **Hoodwinked**, **King of the Hill: Season 6**, **Fullmetal Alchemist Vol. 9** and **Girls Bravo Vol. 6** today. Also, Vancouver hosts the **Reveal 06** festival (www.reveal.ea.com).



Hoodwinked

4-10 Check out the fine toons playing at the **5th Annual International Festival of Animated Films** in Trebon, Czech Republic (www.anifest.cz).



5 The summer blockbuster season officially begins when director J. J. Abrams' **Mission: Impossible III** opens in theaters, starring everyone's favorite lovebird/scientologist, Tom Cruise. Ving Rhames, Keri Russell, Laurence Fishburne, Billy Crudup and Jonathan Rhys Meyers are part of the kick-butt cast.



Mission Impossible 3

7 Looking for some Turkish delights? Then check out the **3rd Istanbul Animation and Visual Effects Shorts Film Competition** (www.iafistanbul.com). The Big Apple is the place to be for **ASIFA-East's Animated Film Festival** (www.asifaeast.com).

9 The attack of the great animated TV series on DVD continues. Today you can choose between **The Best of Boris and Natasha**, **The Best of Rocky and Bullwinkle** and **Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist: Season One**.



Boris and Natasha

10-12 Check out the latest in video games at the **Electronic Entertainment Expo** in downtown L.A. (www.e3expo.com). Also video games meet the art world at the **Into the Pixel** exhibit (www.intothepixel.com).



12 Get ready to dive into Wolfgang Petersen's **Poseidon**, an updated version of the classic '70s sinking cruise-ship disaster flick.



16 There's something for everyone today as we have **Walt Disney's It's a Small World of Fun Vol. 1** and **2**, **Home Movies: Season Four** and **Dragon Ball Z Vol. 9** all hitting the DVD stores on the same day.



Home Movies

18-19 If you live in Toronto, you're probably attending the **International Conference on Asian Comics, Animation and Gaming** (www.yorku.ca/ycar/ACAG%202006).

19 It's a great week for movies as DreamWorks Animation's **Over the Hedge** makes a splash in theaters today. Directed by Tim Johnson and Karey Kirkpatrick, the CG pic features the voices of Bruce Willis, Garry Shandling, Gene Wilder, Steve Carell, Thomas Haden Church, Nick Nolte, William Shatner and Catherine O'Hara.

Also opening is director Ron Howard's much anticipated adaptation of Dan Brown's bestseller **The Da Vinci Code**, starring Tom Hanks, Jean Reno and Audrey Tautou (*Amelie*).



The Da Vinci Code

23 Get ready for a big DVD shopping spree: Out today are **Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Chipmunk Adventure**, **Fairly OddParents: Fairy Idol**, **Samurai Jack: Season 3** and **X-Men Evolution: The Complete Third Season**.



24-28 Find out about the latest Asian sensations at the **Seoul International Cartoon and Animation Festival** (www.sicaf.or.kr).

26 Like everyone else, we're holding our breath, hoping that director Brett Ratner's lowbrow style doesn't wreck a wonderful Marvel franchise as **X-Men: The Last Stand** opens nationwide today.



Avatar

30 Why not celebrate the arrival of summer by splurging on four DVDs featuring killer TV toon shows: **Avatar Book 1 Vol. 3**, **Ghost in the Shell: Season 2 Vol. 5** and [adult swim]'s **The Venture Brothers: Season One**.

To get your company's events and products listed in this monthly calendar, please e-mail sgurman@animationmagazine.net

FRAME-BY-FRAME

Puppy Love

A talented animator's final achievement is showcased in Hello Baby Production's *Jack, the Cuddly Dog*.

By Sarah Gurman



When Max Reynal and Doug Morrione, principal partners at New York's Hello Baby Productions, began working on their project, *Jack, the Cuddly Dog*, they believed the time was right for a new generation of baby properties. Reynal and Morrione (a father and uncle respectively) wanted to introduce a fun and educational viewing option for the two-and-under population which wouldn't over-stimulate them. As a pair of award-winning filmmakers, they were well-equipped to tackle their project-goal.

"At a time when life is continuously accelerating, even for babies, we want to slow things down," Morrione explains. "Our aim is to soothe babies and at the same time make it a more enjoyable experience for parents."

After doing research on their own and consulting with early-childhood psychology and education experts, Reynal and Morrione set out to create the right lead character: They came up with Jack, the Cuddly Dog, taking cues from the appealing organic style of classic properties like *Winnie the Pooh* and *Goodnight Moon*.

"The character of Jack, the Cuddly Dog was inspired by a floppy bunny stuffed animal that my daughter carries around as her best pal and security blanket," Reynal notes.

Aiming to produce a more understated and soothing property, Morrione and Reynal struggled to find the right animator to aptly embody their idea in a drawn character. After a few false starts, they zeroed in on Paul Beard, a former animator from Nickelodeon's *Blue's Clues*. Beard spent many hours working on Jack and was able to finish the drawings for the first half-hour DVD, *Jack, the Cuddly Dog: Colors and Shapes*, with Hello Baby producing the animation.

Sadly, following the project's completion he was killed in a car accident last April at the age of 27. Morrione and Reynal dedicated the film to Beard's memory and donated a portion of the proceeds from *Jack, the Cuddly Dog: Colors and Shapes* to the Paul Beard Memorial Studio in a School, an organization devoted to encouraging arts education for children.

Jack, the Cuddly Dog: Colors and Shapes centers on an adorable yellow pup who lives in a blue house in Central Park and helps kids explore basic elements from the real world like babies, squirrels, turtles, dogs, farm animals and scenes from nature with the help of live-action footage. In addition, the film is edited to run fluidly, at a slow pace that won't overwhelm young minds. To top off the tranquil mood, concert pianist Cheryl Tschanz Newkirk plays compositions by Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mendelssohn and Chopin on the soundtrack.

The producers note that in his future outings, Jack will explore new musical genres. Hello Baby also has plans to release a *Jack, the Cuddly Dog* baby book and plush toy later this year. Though the tragedy of Beard's death weighs heavily on Reynal and Morrione, they find joy knowing that the spirit of Beard is truly reflected in the kindness and wonderment of the character he crafted. ■

For more information about the *Jack, the Cuddly Dog: Colors and Shapes* DVD (\$19.99) and Hello Baby Productions, visit www.jackthecuddlydog.com.



Max Reynal and Doug Morrione



Paul Beard

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Speed Racer to Roam the Internet Superhighway



When Jeff Nodelman was a kid, he would never miss an episode of the *Speed Racer* TV series. Now the former CEO and founder of New York-based studio Noodlesoup (and creator of Cartoon Network's *Venture Brothers*) is reuniting with his childhood hero on a new project. Nodelman is overseeing a high-end Flash-animated show featuring the popular anime created by Tatsuo Yoshida in 1966. Developed by Speed Racer Enterprises and New York-based toy manufacturer Art Asylum and animated by Creative Group's ANImagic studio, the new *Speed Racer* will start its engine this summer.

"In this new version, Speed is all grown up and has a pair of twin kids named Speed Jr.

and Velocity who are also on the racing circuit," says Nodelman. "The whole show is much faster than the original. We pay homage to the original, and we also take some stylistic cues from *Alias*, *Teen Titans* and *Kill Bill*. The idea is that parents will be able to watch it with their kids and all get something out of it."

Plans are in place to make episodes and behind-the-scenes footage of the toon available online. Kids can also get their hands on episodes of the show packaged with a new line of Speed Racer toys. "The episodes are four- to seven-minutes long," explains Nodelman, "and they work very nicely as cliffhangers." Yes, that means young fans of the show will have to buy a series of toys to get the complete storyline!

Nodelman believes this is a great opportunity for IP (Internet Protocol) to be distributed, but he adds, "the end goal would be to eventually get to a television or film distributor, but this way should attract and build a substantial audience." For more information visit www.speedracer.com.

—Ramin Zahed

Dykstra Directs Tortoise & Hippo

Having earned Oscars for his work on the *Star Wars* and *Spider-Man* film franchises, vfx John Dykstra is trying out his directing chops with a new feature based on a real-life friendship between a 100-year-old tortoise and a baby hippo. Tentatively titled *Tortoise and Hippo*, the Walden Media/Relevant Ent. film is based on a wire-service photo depicting the animal odd couple cuddling up at a wildlife sanctuary in India after the devastating



2004 tsunami in Asia.

Shrek co-writer Roger S.H. Schulman is penning the script and Andrew Adamson (*Shrek*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*) is in talks to produce the live-action/CG pic. Much like *Narnia*, the tortoise and hippo flick will feature stylized, photo-real animal characters in live-action environments.

Dykstra, who helped form world-renowned vfx studio Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) with George Lucas and Gary Kurtz, is currently working as visual effects designer for Sony Pictures Imageworks. In addition to the *Spider-Man* films, his credits with the company include *Stuart Little*, for which he directed second-unit photography. His full-on directorial debut, *Tortoise and Hippo*, is expected to arrive in theaters in 2007, just in time for the star's 100somethingth birthday!

—Ryan Ball

Books We Love

by Sarah Gurman

Creating Characters with Personality

by Tom Bancroft

(Watson-Guptill Publications, \$19.95)

Disney animator Tom Bancroft's latest take on the art of character development is a choice pick for artists who want their creations to pack a charisma punch. Bancroft, who designed Mushu the dragon from *Mulan* and founded character powerhouse Funnypages Productions, has delivered a well-written and accessible guide filled with illustrations and words of wisdom from experts like Glen Keane, Peter de Sève, Mark Henn, J. Scott Campbell and Jack Davis. *Creating*



Characters with Personality should resonate with beginners and professionals alike, as it gives step-by-step explanations for building a distinctive character, developing a context for the personality within a script, establishing a hierarchy and maximizing the effects of pose and expression. Each chapter ends with useful exercises, which can help you cultivate memorable odd-ball creations that can tell an entire story without a single word. Whether you're working in film, TV, graphic novels, games, cartoons or comics, with Bancroft's help, your characters will be expressing themselves in no time! [Also, check out Brad Manzo's article on page 70 for more tips on the same subject from the pros.] ■



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Back on the *Rampage*!

Midway, Pipeworks and Shadedbox resurrect an arcade classic with *Rampage: Total Destruction*. by Ryan Ball



GAMES

If you're old enough to remember having to stockpile quarters to get your gaming fix, you probably recall stuffing those coins one after another into one of Midway's *Rampage* machines for some hard-hitting, giant monster mayhem. To give fans a nostalgic stomp down memory lane and introduce the franchise to a new generation of button mashers, Midway has teamed with developer Pipeworks Software and Shadedbox Animations to unleash *Rampage: Total Destruction*.

Pipeworks Software president Dan Duncalf says a goal from day one was to preserve the feel of the original game, which involved giving the 3D graphics a 2D aesthetic and bringing back the "trio of terror." George the Ape, Lizzie the Lizard and Ralph the Werewolf return to do some more damage to what are now fully destructible cities.

"The biggest change, of course, is that the monsters are now real 3D models with cloth, hair, fins, claws and the fluid animation you would expect from current-generation game characters," says Duncalf. "By combining innovative bone rigging techniques and cloth technology, we were able to create some very interesting, non-biped characters such as a squid and a jellyfish."

There are more than 25 new characters to unlock in the game. Lurking in various levels are aquatic beasts including a shark and a swamp creature, as well as mythical monsters such as the Cyclops,

the Jackalope and a flaming-headed demon. Artists from both Pipeworks and Midway worked on designing the new monsters, but the honor of retooling George, Lizzie and Ralph went to the Pipeworks team. "We felt it was important to preserve the original feel of the monsters visually, and to stick with the giant-animal theme," Duncalf notes. "We also wanted to keep the atmosphere light. This isn't a brutal game; it's a funny, light-hearted action game. Our monsters reflect that in their hilarious facial expressions, reactions, and attitudes."

Duncalf says the first goal for the game's animation was to create animation that harkened back to classic cartoons. "We paid close attention to squash-and-stretch and follow-through—pushing many of the animations over the top," he remarks. "A character we had a lot of fun animating was Cal the Squid. This character has six long tentacles and no face, so it was a challenge to give him expression and attitude only through its rubbery body language."

The city destruction element presented some interesting animation challenges since more than 200 unique events had to be created. The most elaborate of these involves a water tower on top of a soap factory. Destroying the water tower sends water cascading into the soap factory and causes suds to stream out of the windows and onto the street below, where mon-

sters slip and slide on it. This is also an example of how the team managed to keep the destruction funny, as well as viscerally satisfying.

"In my opinion, [the challenge] wasn't so much the destructible environment as it was getting the collision to obey what the environments were doing," comments James Almeida, animation director for Midway Games. "It had to look like the character was collapsing with the building. Many times, it transported the characters to places that looked completely unlike real physics, but I think the team came up with something that looked convincing."

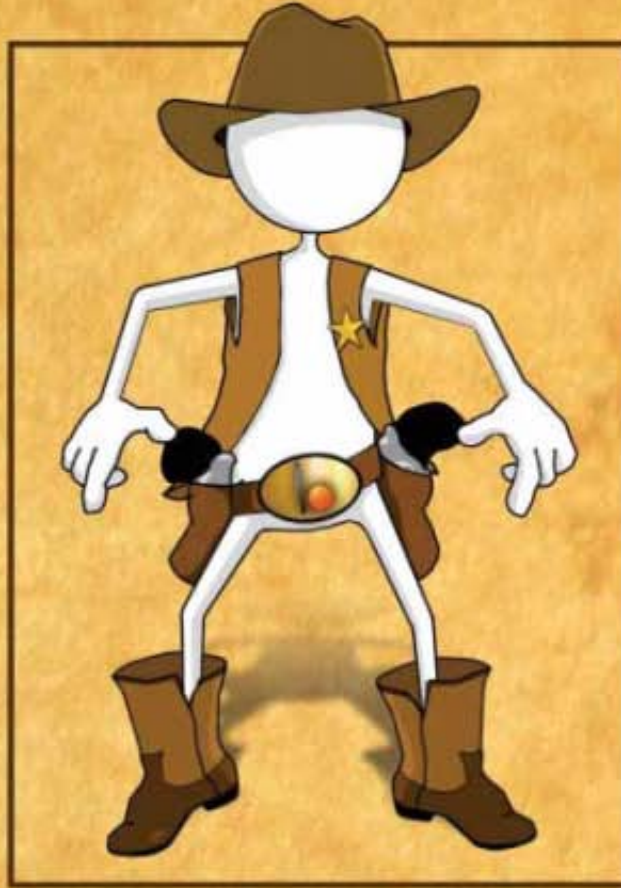
The Cinematic sequences were produced by Shadedbox using Alias' Maya for animation and Adobe After Effects for compositing. "The most entertaining part was capturing the story's absurdity and the characters' personalities," says Shadedbox co-founder Joey Jones. "Each of the four main characters—the marketing guy, Dr. Vector, George and Mr. Z—were designed using archetypal body shapes, inspired by '50s animation designs, that allowed the animators to exaggerate their gestures and attitudes."

Above all, Midway wanted *Rampage: Total Destruction* to be a laugh-out-loud gaming experience, and if that meant throwing in a little potty humor, then so be it. "Monsters will exhibit bad manners after eating several people or other edibles found throughout the game," Duncalf reveals. "Nothing feels better than a hearty belch after downing a busload of tourists. And never, I repeat, NEVER pull a monster's finger after it's just eaten a grenadier." Truly words to live by. ■

***Rampage: Total Destruction* for PlayStation 2 and GameCube will be wreaking havoc at retail on April 24.**



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Rule the Galaxy!

The interstellar struggle continues in Stardock Ent.'s *Galactic Civilizations II: Dread Lords*. **by Ryan Ball**

GAMES

Brad Wardell, president of Stardock Ent., originally wrote *Galactic Civilizations* for OS 2 back in the early '90s, then rewrote it for Windows in 2003. While the title did fairly well for an OS 2 game, the Windows version sold around 150,000 units worldwide in the first year, prompting the team at Stardock to get working on a sequel to the space-based strategy game.

The *Galactic Civilizations* franchise casts the player as leader of a civilization that is expanding into the galaxy, colonizing new planets and interacting with alien life forms, sometimes not so cordially. There are three ways to win the game. You can conquer everyone, become so technologically advanced that no one can conquer you or form political alliances with all of the other civilizations.

Wardell admits that the graphics in the first game were

a bit primitive but says they really wanted to make the sequel a more immersive experience, driven by a 3D engine with no polygon count limit. This is especially attractive for players who enjoy building their own ships in the game. Users can choose from a stockpile of provided parts that snap together like virtual LEGO pieces, a feature that proved so popular that Stardock turned around and put out version 1.0x, an update that has more pieces to put on ships and simplifies the process a bit.

Players can also import models from other sources without having to worry about exceeding polygon restrictions. "We've already had modders taking ships that are on the net where people have modeled out 100,000- to 1,000,000-polygon things from *Star Trek*, *Star Wars* or whatever their favorite show is, and they can actually put those right in the game and they run!" Wardell tells us. "We're talking stuff that was not

designed for real-time but rather for a cut-scene or a scene in a TV show. Someone had a screenshot of a Bird of Prey from *Star Trek* in there and the model had to have had a million polygons in it. They had a whole fleet of them fighting it out."

Galactic Civilizations II draws inspiration from a number of popular sci-fi influences, and Wardell says players can tailor the game to their own spaced-out tastes. He comments, "You can play it like a *Star Trek* game, where all your ships are capital ships, or you can play it out like *Battlestar Galactica*, where you have a big capital ship and a bunch of little fighters going back and forth—or anything in between."

While animation doesn't play that big of a role in the main strategy aspect of the game, the Stardock artists put a lot of work into making the space skirmishes play out like cinematic sequences. "When you get into the battles, the animation effort went into making sure the ships move smoothly and realistically around each other," Wardell remarks. "For example, collision detection—in a game like this, with so many ships flying around the screen, you don't want ships running into each other or, worse, going through each other."

The game also boasts a lot of cut scenes, making it by far Stardock's most challenging production because of all the art involved. The crew used a combination of Maya and 3ds Max to create compelling movies that help gamers get lost in their own "Captain Kirk" fantasies, so to speak. But Wardell thinks the coolest thing about the game is the computer AI, though he's a bit biased since he wrote it.

"The computer players have been written to play like they're other people," he says. "They're not designed just to be tough. At the low levels, for example, they'll make mistakes and actually do dumb things. At the higher level, they play very cleverly." Apparently, as the title suggests, these are lords you'll come to dread!

Stardock Ent. is currently working on an MMOG titled *Society*, but it won't be out for another couple of years. Until then, you can warp over to your local retailer and pick up *Galactic Civilizations* for PC now. ■





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Junior



Another Animal Attraction?

Disney's CG-animated movie about New York City zoo animals who find themselves out of place in nature tries to avoid comparisons with DreamWorks' *Madagascar*.

by Thomas J. McLean



Disney's new CGI animated feature *The Wild* showcases a lion and a giraffe leading a pack of escaped New York zoo animals, all voiced by celebrity actors, traveling to Africa—but it's no *Madagascar*.

"Audiences really love our movie," insists producer Clint Goldman. "We get very few comparisons from people who've seen the movie to *Madagascar*."

But that doesn't completely erase the struggle the cast and crew of the film have faced since DreamWorks released the CG-animated *Madagascar* to box office and critical success.

"As filmmakers we've had to live through this for quite a few years. It's been painful," Goldman adds. "We had a really difficult challenge in front of us, and, at the end of the day, we made a movie that people are really going to love and enjoy."

The Wild tells the story of a lion named Samson (voiced by Kiefer Sutherland of Fox's *24* fame), whose teenage son is accidentally shipped to Africa and goes



in search of him with the help of his animal friends.

And while the basic premise is almost identical to that of *Madagascar*, director Steve "Spaz" Williams says he and the studio expect *The Wild* to stand on its own, beginning with the look of the film, which draws on Williams' visual effects background to create a look that is photorealistic and expressive. "It doesn't look like a Pixar movie, and it doesn't look like a DreamWorks movie."

Williams started out a graduate of Toronto's Sheridan College, going on to do visual effects at ILM on *The Abyss*, *The Mask* and *Jurassic Park*. It was there he met Goldman, and the pair struck out

on their own in 1996 to work on *Spawn*, based on the Todd McFarlane comic book, with Goldman producing and Williams supervising visual effects and directing second unit.

After *Spawn*, they made commercials. Williams got plenty of notice from commercials he directed for Blockbuster Vid-

eo starring a CG-animated rabbit and guinea pig known as Carl and Ray. "It was our whole body of work that allowed us to make the next big step, which was *The Wild* at Disney," Goldman says.

By the time the duo came onto the project in 2002, the concept of zoo animals escaping into the wild had been kicked around at nearly every studio since the early 1990s. Most of 2002 was spent refining the story to the studio's satisfaction, and the film was put into production by Disney's live-action division before DreamWorks started on *Madagascar*, Goldman says.

The film begins with one of its more unusual sequences, featuring Samson



City Critters: Although the premise of *The Wild* might seem familiar to animation fans, director Steve Williams points out that there are many elements that make the feature stand apart from the rest. The distinctive Houdini-based CG animation and the eclectic voice talent of stars such as Eddie Izzard, William Shatner, Kiefer Sutherland and Janeane Garofalo certainly make the movie distinctive in its own way.



Steve Williams

recounting his youth to his son—a tale that is later revealed to be exaggerated. The scene is rendered and animated in CG but has a 2D style developed by Ken Duncan and Mike Smith at Real Effects. “People who go see the movie will not have been introduced to that look,” Goldman notes. “It’s going to be a big surprise.”

Williams and Goldman say *The Wild*’s combination of zany humor and a Disney-style story at its heart is entertaining enough and different enough to squelch comparisons. “One of the challenges of the movie was to weave the nutty comedy with the emotional arc. That was one of the things that

plagued us until the 11th hour,” Goldman admits.

Williams says the film benefited from a collaborative process that included animators and voice actors. “We didn’t want to go in there and just use sort of standard Hollywood writers who would give us scripts more like old radio shows,” he adds.

The best example is Nigel, a Koala bear voiced by English comedian Eddie Izzard. The character had only a few lines until Williams met with Izzard and hashed out the character, taking him from minor player to the crux of the third act’s major plot twist. “Spaz just got into a booth with Eddie and in the course of three to four hours they came up with the character,” according to Goldman.

Similarly, Williams says William Shatner completely invented his corny villain



Eddie Izzard

character and Sutherland enjoyed coming up with comedy bits for Samson. Even Don Cherry, the loud plaid-clad hockey commentator, chimed in, lending his voice to a sequence featuring animals using turtles as curling stones.

Since Williams had connections with animators in his hometown of Toronto, the production made its home there after pre-production work was done in San Francisco. Williams notes that most of the animators were well versed in Softimage and Alias, but “the



one we hadn't tried yet was Houdini." Side Effects Software, the maker of Houdini, happens to be in Toronto and loaned a few engineers to help out Williams' crew of about 50 animators. And luckily the crew at Toronto's C.O.R.E. Feature Animation, the effects house producing the CG visuals, was well-versed in the ways of Houdini. Rendering was done with RenderMan. Altogether, the animation work began in the fall of 2003 and took two years to complete.

Although *Madagascar* made it to the screen first, Williams and Goldman say they're happy so far with the response they've gotten from preview audiences. Nevertheless, the feature may have a tough time finding its audience, since it's tightly sandwiched between Fox/Blue Sky's *Ice Age 2: Meltdown* which was released on March 31 and DreamWorks Animation's much-anticipated *Over the Hedge*, which will introduce another group of lovable CG-animated animals to moviegoers on May 19. You can anticipate a hugely competitive animated summer derby when John Lasseter's Pixar opus *Cars* zooms out of the Disney garage on June 9.

At the end of the day, Goldman stands behind his group of digital animals and their special journey of discovery. "We made the best film we could possibly make," he said. "It's eye candy from minute one to minute 76." ■

Thomas J. McLean is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in animation, visual effects and comic books.

Disney's *The Wild* is unleashed on April 14.

C.O.R.E. Goes Wild for Houdini

by Sarah Gurman

John Mariella knew his dexterous team at Toronto's C.O.R.E. Feature Animation was facing a daunting task when they came on board to create the CG visuals for Disney's *The Wild*. Prior to this film, C.O.R.E. had predominantly worked in visual effects, creating shots for films like *Dr. Dolittle* and *The Nutty Professor II: The Klumps*. As Mariella, VP of C.O.R.E. and CG supervisor on *The Wild* notes, "We were never doing wall-to-wall CG in film res, you know, 1,500 shots, 76 minutes worth, that's a rare thing."

But Mariella felt confident because his talented crew already knew the ins and outs of Houdini (C.O.R.E. has used the software throughout its 12-year existence), which they would be relying on exclusively to rig and animate the CG characters, control lighting, generate environments, clean-up models and manage the many other assets that came along with this feature-length project.

Having the fellow Toronto-based Side Effects Software (proud parents of Houdini) within reach, also set Mariella a little more at ease. "They were on-site as well, seeing issues first hand, literally a partner with us in producing the work," he says. Over the course of two-years working on *The Wild*, the C.O.R.E. team would give Side Effects feedback as they encountered problems and the engineers at Side Effects would develop Houdini or point out features built into the package to address the challenges that were arising. "It was a good growth opportunity for everybody", Mariella says. "We evolved our filmmaking techniques and they evolved the software to support it."

In addition to the enthusiasm of the developers at Side Effects and C.O.R.E.'s solid relationship with the company, Mariella highlights the dexterity of the software that makes Houdini his tool of choice. "Once you've used it for a number of years and know what it's capable of, you realize there are really no limits," he explains. "Even if you're presented with a crowd shot of hundreds of furry animals, you kind of just assume, ok, we've never tackled anything that complex before, but I'm sure we'll figure it out and it will work. You know, it's that kind of software." ■

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Parasite Now: John Gajdecki supervised the stomach-turning vfx for the new horror pic, *Slither* in which wormlike aliens wreak havoc in a small town.

Slime Time

The vfx team for the alien-invasion horror spoof *Slither* used a variety of means to bring their sinister worm-like aliens to cinematic life. **by Ron Magid**

In a weird way, the bizarre sci fi horror flick, *Slither*, has been like “old home week” for vfx supervisor John Gajdecki, who got his start overseeing visual effects for the *Friday the 13th* and *War of the Worlds* TV series.

“They say everyone in life gets to do what they want second-most, and what I wanted to be was a DP, then I got a job on *Friday the 13th*,” says the Canadian effects meister, who sees a huge upside in the path he chose. “The digital revolution in television happened four years before it hit movies. I got a lot more experience and I became comfortable with the tools. I found the best people come from a camera background because they understand the way images are created and the whole process, plus they have a take charge [attitude.] When people ask me what I do, I say, ‘I kill people for a living!’”

And *Slither* provided opportunities for mortal mayhem that surprised even Gajdecki, who relished working with first-time director James Gunn (screenwriter of the *Dawn of the Dead* remake) and makeup effects artist Todd Masters. “I was brought in around November of 2004, and Todd had been doing design work with James for about six months, so the

plan was to use the standard blend: digital stuff for the wider shots, practical stuff on close-ups.”

Splitting the worms

Gajdecki quickly set up an in-house department, *Slither* Effects, to handle about half the vfx shots, then farmed the rest out to Canadian houses including Meteor, Image Engine, Rocket Science and Switch, Los Angeles-based Kleiser-Walczak and Digital Dimension, plus England’s Glimpse. As the

shot count grew (it eventually went past 270) vfx producer Louise Barkholt was hired to ride herd on the multiple vendors; the workload later was split with Joan Collins Carey.

Slither’s alien takeover is precipitated by the arrival of the Worms, leech-like parasites that eventually infest one of the lead characters, Grant Grant (Michael Rooker), achieved through a combination of Masters’ props and digital effects. Gajdecki hired Image Engine, who had worked with him many years ago creating similar critters for the *Stargate* TV series. “The majority of the work was the parasites, and Image Engine nailed it right away—they have some of the best shots in the film,” Gajdecki says. “For the wider shots, the Worms were all CG. After James finished shooting, we’d take measurements, then capture the lighting using a camera with a 180-degree lens, and walk through the set with a gray ball.”

The team would then put Masters’ prosthetic parasites in the scene and film them, referencing it to match the color and lighting. “To give the worms the proper sliminess, we [selectively] used ray-tracing for those nice, shiny kicks,” adds Gajdecki. “We didn’t need to ray-trace our widest shots with 150 travelers, but for shots where there’s 30 in the background and one or two in close-up, we ray-traced those fore-

continued on page 20



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Classic Media



Slime Time

continued from page 18

ground parasites.”

Shadows and Light

One of Gajdecki's most inventive Worm shots occurs after Kylie (Tania Saulnier) is chased by the parasites into her truck, then we watch her through the windshield, which is quickly inundated in writhing slime. “The script called for shadows on her face, then totally went to black,” he explains. “Well, no one's going to be able to animate that, because it involves tracking shadows all over her. So we rendered a 30-second piece of an early parasite test, where they squiggle in from the sides until the screen is black. We brought the truck into the soundstage, and using a really good digital projector, projected this image through some glass onto her face, so it looks like the parasites are crawling over the windshield. It worked so well—as her face



timing. We'd work with the editors, animate, then, they'd cut it in and come back with trims that needed to be animated. There's a really nice continuity of movement.”

The tubules growing from Grant's stomach were physically created by Masters with CG animation by Digital Dimension. “These are for impregnating his victims; there's an A and B part, and you have to be

plodes, unleashing thousands of parasites. There's no way to hand-animate 27,000 parasites, but Meteor had experience with this kind of procedural work.”

On the practical side, Gajdecki insisted on dump tanks filled with red “amniotic fluid” and hundreds of liquid-filled condom “parasites” that swam along with the flow. So what does an animator reference to create an exploding Brenda? “It was really important to James and to me that this felt organic and physics-based, so we filmed huge water balloons exploding at high speed,” Gajdecki says. “We drew a grid pattern on the water balloons, and before we blew it up, we'd slap it, which created these cool undulations. Then we'd track those vertices onto her body, which gave us this bizarre motion. Subsequently we hand-animated her head peeling away to the side, as her body explodes. Have you ever thrown a water balloon? There wasn't much left! Then Meteor used a simulation to create thousands of wriggling parasites.”

Despite *Slither's* budget and some 70 last-minute vfx shots added after a successful test screening, Gajdecki says he enjoyed working with Gunn. “James learns very quickly, so at the beginning he was listening, and by the end, he was saying, ‘This is what I want,’ and I said, ‘Good idea, boss,’” he says. And the results? He responds, “Every time I look at it, I think, ‘This is a good movie’—though it may be a little disturbing for some viewers.” ■

Ron Magid is a Los Angeles-based journalist who specializes in visual effects.

Universal's *Slither* opened in theaters across the U.S. on March 31.

“To give the Worms the proper sliminess, we [selectively] used ray-tracing for those nice, shiny kicks. We didn't need to ray-trace our widest shots with 150 travelers, but for shots where there's 30 in the background and one or two in close-up, we ray traced those foreground parasites.”

—John Gajdecki, *Slither's* visual effects supervisor

moves, they track across the bridge of her nose, the eye sockets. I got the pre-viz guys to do it, and they just banged on this as the shooting was coming to an end, and it looks totally real.”

Then there was the transformation of Grant into a space zombie, covered with massive tentacles and tubules. Grant's ever-increasing form was created using Masters' prosthetics, but the movements of both types of appendages were often better achieved digitally. The octopus-like tentacles were animated by Gajdecki's in-house team and Kleiser-Walczak in some 30 shots.

“The tentacles were big heavy-duty CG models requiring 15 layers and about 200 steps to get the proper slimy look,” Gajdecki says. “We put a lot of work into pre-viz and early animation to get the ideal weight and

impregnated by both,” Gajdecki reveals. “There's a claw at one end that punches through the victim's skin, then pumps fluid into them.”

Explosive Scene

Grant's most infamous victim is Brenda (Brenda Gutierrez), who swells to 12' across as the parasites grow within her, accomplished via a disgusting Todd Masters bodysuit. Just when you think she can't grow anymore—she explodes, all over several folks who happen to be in the vicinity. “Meteor did the Brenda Bursting, which was probably the hardest thing to do,” Gajdecki concedes. “James described it as a fish farm writhing under her skin. The parasites sense there's meat in the room, so her whole body starts jerking and trying to get to these people, and then she ex-

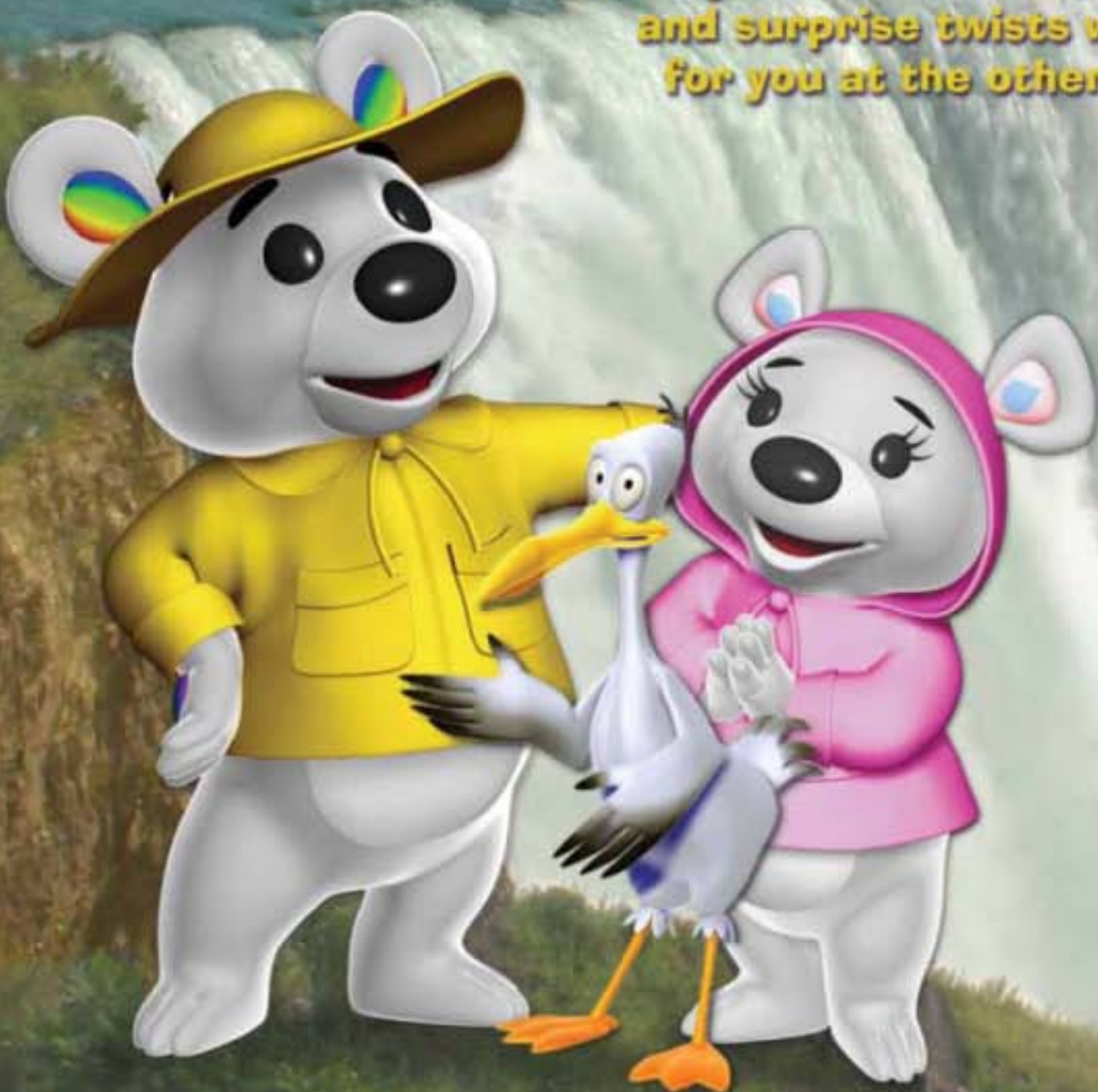
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Fawning over *Bambi II*

Director Brian Pimental and animation consultant Andreas Deja discuss the making of a sequel based on one of the most popular animated features of all time.

by Jake Friedman

With the steady flow of Disney's straight-to-video sequels, some purists were initially skeptical about the company's recent release of *Bambi II*. However, the sequel to David Hand's 1942 classic has done remarkably well in DVD stores and in overseas territories where it was released theatrically. Directed by Brian Pimental, the feature has also received strong reviews from critics around the world.

The sequel picks up at precisely the moment in which Bambi looks back in the snow after the fatal gunshot before he follows his emotionally distant father, the Great Prince of the Forest, deeper into the woods. Instead of having a heavy plot line, the film focuses on the gradual growing relationship between Bambi (voiced by *Finding Nemo* ace Alexander Gould) and his father (voiced marvelously by Patrick Stewart), how each learn from the other and how they cope together over the death of a loved one.

"I just couldn't wrap my head around a story that didn't deal in some way with the loss of

his mother," says Pimental, a Disney veteran who has worked on numerous animated features in the past two decades, including *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Tarzan*. "Knowing that there must have been some connection there also from his father, the Great Prince. They were such polar opposites in their characters, it just lent itself to a good story. Bambi was so needy and so helpless, and the Great Prince was so self-sufficient and so isolated."



Producing the film in Disney's last vestige of quality traditional animation, its studio in Australia, Pimental brought aboard lead Disney animator Andreas Deja (Scar from *The Lion King*, Jafar from *Aladdin*, Gaston from *Beauty*

and the Beast and Lilo from *Lilo & Stitch*) as animation consultant. "I thought, maybe if we brought Andreas, he could give some talks about anatomy and animation, and also be a source of inspiration for them and be somebody they could go to with questions."

Deja's initial reaction to the concept was less than whole-hearted excitement. He admits, "I wasn't that enthusiastic about it and I basically told him, 'Who needs another *Bambi*?' But I took a look at the story reel and thought it was amazing. It was truthful to the characters, and it wasn't trying to be hip or modern."

So how did Deja tackle the remake of a classic? "It was a different challenge. I always thought that when it comes to animation, nothing could be more difficult than animating *Bambi*, because of the realism involved and the subtleties. You wonder as an artist, 'Can you do this?'"

In addition to the drawing classes of live deer and the anatomy workshops, Pimental and Deja emphasized the importance of the works of the classic Disney animators, and dissected scenes from the original feature.

"I did a lot of workshops and lectures about the old film, we looked at it frame-by-frame, I gave out handouts of do's and don'ts about the characters, going over model sheets—mostly Milt Kahl's, because he did the final models for all the deer." Above all, Deja stressed the emotion of the final product over design. "I told everybody, 'think about the acting,' and to draw loose. They're used to drawing pretty tight down there so they get the scenes through quicker and give clean-up less work. But if you draw too tight, you think about the drawing too much. You can't really internalize."

While Deja worked on cultivating the feel of the original animation, Pimental fought to maintain a steady pacing of the story, and to keep the colors from being oversaturated. "The goal was to make it as close to the original as possible. Everybody sees



Brian Pimental



Andreas Deja

what makes Bambi differently, what gives it its look. Our art director, Carol Police, really did a great job of breaking down stylistic things in the movie, how they use dark against light, or how they use Asian influences in

branches. And once we had that, it became the guide of how to make our movie."

Pimental even insisted that traditional artistic media be used to render the backgrounds, until it was realized that replicating the oil paintings was a major feat. "We tried it, and there was just so much trouble to get colors to bleed together and capture that style.

Once we went digital, there was so much more control. I was pretty adamant in the beginning about using oils, but we just weren't getting the results." And for inquiring minds, the antlers on the grown deer are indeed traced CG images.

For aesthetic purists, the film does a good job of staying true to the vision of the 1942 classic. To the emotionally heartbroken, it provides closure for those who missed Bambi's mother and

wanted to see the fawn's growth.

"I wouldn't compare it to the first one, ever," says Deja, "but for what it is, I think it came out remarkably well." Pimental agrees. "We knew we had to try to deliver something that felt, in spirit, like it wasn't detracting from the original. I was hoping to stay true to the source and not betray it." ■

Jake Friedman is a New York-based animator. You can visit his website at www.jakefriedman.net.



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Illustration by Pres Romanillos

by Charles Solomon

Case Closed:
One Truth Prevails: Case One
[FUNimation: \$44.98, 2-disc set]
Naruto: Vol 1: Enter Naruto
[Viz: \$19.98]
One Piece Vol. 1:
King of the Pirates [Viz: \$19.98]

Three popular *shonen* (boy's series) with unconventional but determined heroes show that working an animated hit in Japan may not be a lifetime sinecure, but it comes close. *Naruto* ran for more than 175 episodes; *One Piece*, more than 250; and *Case Closed*, a staggering 430-plus, which eclipses even *The Simpsons*.

Ninja-in-training Naruto Uzumaki is a classic bad boy with a spiky blond crew cut. He resists all discipline and pulls pranks that include painting graffiti on the ninja equivalent of Mt. Rushmore. Part of his mischievous nature comes from his curious origins: Twelve years before the opening of the series, a demon in the shape of a nine-tailed fox attacked the ninja settlement of Hidden Leaf Village. The *Hokage* (most powerful ninja) imprisoned the demon in the body of baby Naruto. As his parents were killed by the fox-spirit, Naruto grew up an orphan—and an outcast. His dream of becoming *Hokage* was all that kept him going.

After finally graduating from the Academy, Naruto begins his real training. On the first day, the cocky prankster falls for classmate Sakura Haruno, although it's not clear why he likes this rude snob. He also makes an enemy of Sasuke Uchiha. The Naruto-Sasuke rivalry is typical of *shonen* anime: countless series pit a rowdy, come-from-be-

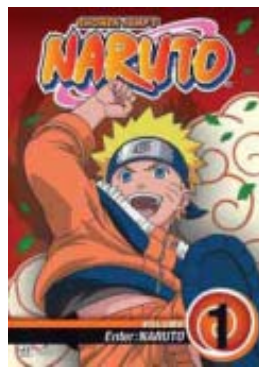
hind hero against an icy, talented prodigy. The outcome may be predictable from their first meeting, but the fans don't seem to care.

When manga artist Eiichiro Oda launched *One Piece* in the weekly magazine *Shonen Jump*, he set out to write the story he wanted to read as a boy. Apparently a lot of readers share his taste for comic adventures: the collected manga runs to 40 volumes, and the animated series scored a huge hit.

Monkey D. Luffy (pronounced "Loofy") is not what the Japanese call a *bishonen* ("beautiful boy"): His goggle eyes, rubbery limbs and goliwog grin make him look like the natural child of Olive Oyl and Bimbo.

Luffy is determined to acquire a cool ship, assemble an amazing crew and make himself King of the Pirates—which means finding One Piece, the fabulous treasure hidden long ago in the Grand Line. Because he once ate the "Gum Gum," a "cursed fruit" that imparts magical powers, Luffy can stretch his arms and legs almost infinitely. This talent enables him to climb almost anywhere and turn his huge hands and feet into slingshot-like weapons.

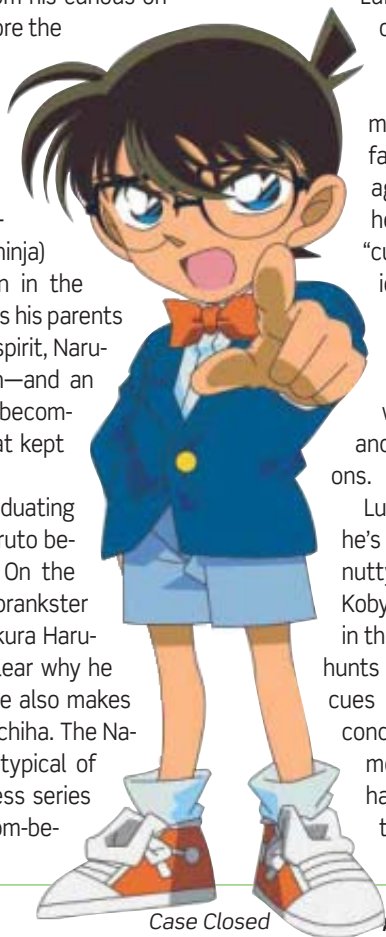
Luffy may look ungainly, but he's got a heart of gold. In his first nutty adventure, he helps nerdy Koby fulfill his dream of enlisting in the navy, even though the navy hunts down pirates. Luffy also rescues ace swordsman Zolo on the condition that he become the first member of his crew. *One Piece* has a looser, cartoonier feel than most anime.



Jimmy Kudo is a brilliant but arrogant seventeen-year-old detective known as "The Modern Sherlock Holmes." When he surprises two men in black making a payoff, they slip him a pill that transforms him into a seven-year-old boy. To disguise his identity Jimmy assumes the name Conan Edogawa—from mystery writers Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Ranpo Edogawa. Jimmy's girlfriend Rachel

Moore and her dim detective father take the mysterious orphan into their home. As Conan, Jimmy continues to unravel mysteries with the help of secret devices from eccentric inventor Dr. Agasa. Because he looks like a little boy, the police ignore Jimmy's ideas, so he knocks out Detective Moore and uses the older man's voice to explain the solution (via a voice-altering device hidden in his bow tie). Trapped in a pint-sized body, Jimmy searches for the men in black to obtain the antidote while trying to keep Rachel from discovering his true identity.

As a footnote, it's interesting to note that in Japan, *Case Closed* is *Meitantei Conan*, literally, "Famous Detective Conan," a play off the title of Hayao Miyazaki's *Meitantei Holmes* ("Famous Detective Holmes"), the adventures of the canine sleuth Americans know as *Sherlock Hound*. ■



Case Closed

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

Down to Business

This month's releases weigh in on serious issues like intergalactic stability, national security and the Gadget copter. **by Sarah Gurman**

Tripping the Rift: Season 2 [Anchor Bay, \$29.98]

Space geeks of the world unite: Here's your chance to check out the second season of the warped Sci Fi Channel CG-animated toon, which chronicles the adventures of captain Chode and his eccentric crew aboard starship Jupiter 42 as they blast through space leaving an entertaining trail of innuendo and potty-mouth humor in their wake.

If you're unfamiliar with the hit show created by Chuck Austen and Chris Moeller, you should take a moment to meet the intriguing members of the *Tripping the Rift* squad. Take the buxom android Six (voiced by Carmen Electra who replaces Gina Gershon in Season 2—who'd a thunk it?). Capable of faking over 2,000 types of orgasms in over 600 languages, she's a piece of intergalactic libido to be reckoned with, and obviously well qualified to be the ship's science officer. Then there's the debauchery obsessed purple blob Chode masterminding the whole operation with Whip, your typical slacker amphibian, A.I. Bob, Gus and the ship's hard-talking pilot T'Nuk traveling across the galaxy in the midst of an ongoing battle between the conformist Confederation and the corporate-minded Dark-Clowns.

DVD owners can relive exploits like the journey to the gay planet, Fabulous Heaven, to deliver 10,000 tubes of butt jelly, the battles in the Bermuda Quadrant and fun with

space splooge. Though the CG animation (Film Roman) may leave something to be desired and the raging-hor-



mone humor feels tedious at times, if crude and sultry aliens do it for you, this release will hit the spot.

American Dad Vol. 1 [20th Century Fox, \$39.98]

Seth MacFarlane got cracking on *American Dad* immediately after Fox can-

celled the first incarnation of his original sarcasm-reveling series, *Family Guy* in 2002. And though this second MacFarlane brainchild for Fox bears a strong resemblance to its animated predecessor, the life and times of *American Dad*'s Smith family have a decidedly more political bend than the that of the *Family Guy*'s Griffin crew. (According to MacFarlane, much of the show's premise developed from his dissatisfaction with the Bush presidency.) The three-disc release delivers the first 13 episodes, featuring the MacFarlane-voiced CIA agent Stan Smith as head of a charmingly dysfunctional household. While Stan is trying to get a handle on the terrorist threat level in his professional mode he also has to deal with his former wild child wife

Francine, Roger the alcoholic alien who the Smith's are hiding, a destined-to-be dorky son Steve, left-wing sympathizing daughter Hayley and Klaus the lascivious German-speaking pet fish.

In addition to the episodes, the DVD offers fans deleted scenes, a "Making of" featurette and commentary on select episodes from creators and producers, including MacFarlane, Mike Barker and Matt Weitzman. *Family Guy* fans who were apprehensive about this series will breathe



a sigh of relief once they spend some time with *American Dad*: whether Francine is reconnecting with her heyday at Burning Man or Karl Rove is managing Stan's campaign to become church deacon, the Smith's provide salute-worthy viewing.

Inspector Gadget: The Original Series (Shout Factory, \$34.98)

With so many of our beloved TV shows from the past coming out on DVD, some real gems get lost in the shuffle. Of course, we wouldn't let that happen to *Inspector Gadget*, the clever animated series gleaned from the bright mind of DIC's Andy

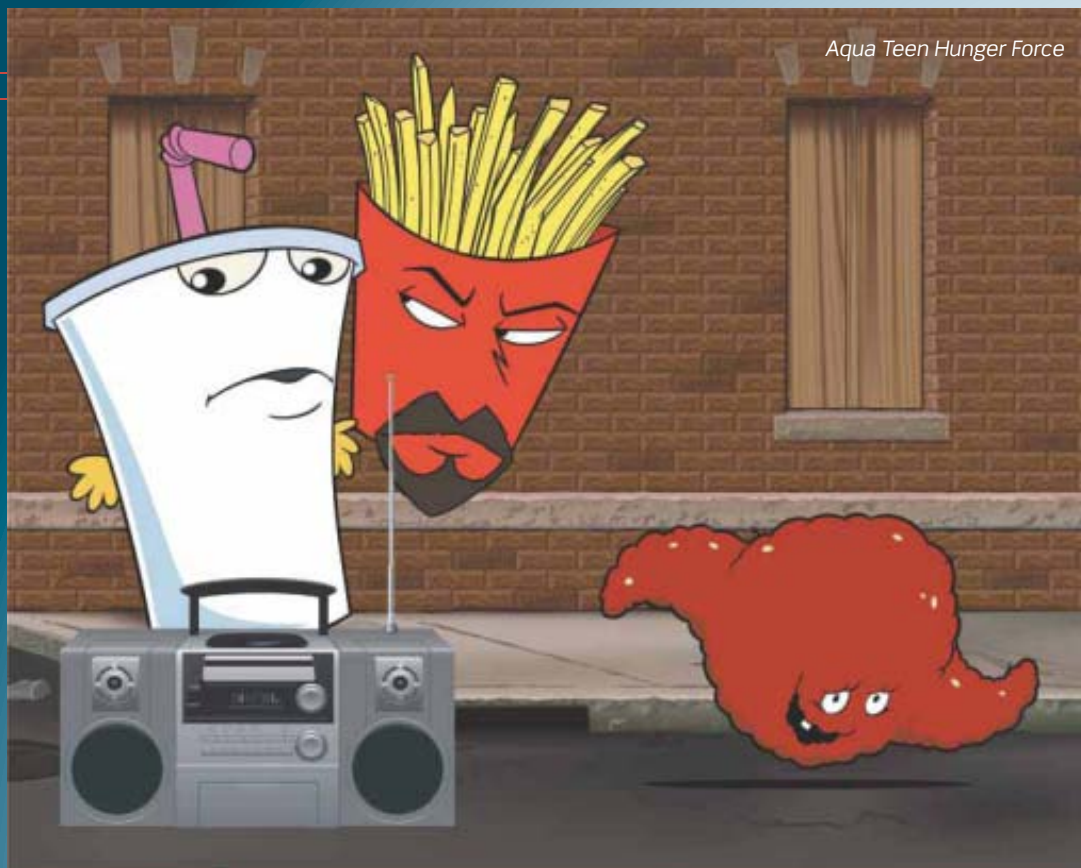
Heyward. (The upcoming release of the of *The Facts of Life*'s first two seasons will not go unappreciated in this office either!). Viewers got their first taste of Gadget, appropriately voiced by *Get Smart*'s Don Adams, in 1983, when the bionic bumbling detective began foiling Dr. Claw's evil plots over at M.A.D. with the help of his precocious niece Penny and her master of disguise

pup Brain.

It's easy to see why the show became a worldwide hit after the first season, and inspired two live-action movies and a new CG-animated DVD project last year. The series was always good for a laugh courtesy of Chief Quimby's self-destructing message at the start of each episode, Dr. Claw proved an intriguing villain as we never glimpsed his face and honestly, what kid didn't wish for pop-up roller skates, a neck-tie with lasso capabilities and best of all, a helicopter hat. The long-time-coming DVD release includes

extras like the "Wowsers" feature, which takes a retrospective look at Gadget with Andy Heyward and DIC COO Mike Maliani, an original art gallery and the fan art contest winner. Go, Gadget, go! ■





Aqua Teen Hunger Force

dering about that one. And when you look at the variety and range of the shows on the block—from *The Venture Brothers* and *Tom goes to the Mayor* to *Robot Chicken* and *The Boondocks*—it's not so easy to define what makes the toons stand out in a very cluttered landscape. But it's easy to spot an [adult swim] show as soon as you see the first couple of minutes.

Keith Crofford, the president of [adult swim] and VP of production for Cartoon Network, who is also

the exec producer of many of the block's original shows, can't believe it's been 13 years since he and Mike Lazzo came up with the genius idea to play with some of the classic Hanna-Barbera shows the cabler had in its library. The results were the clever shows such as *Space Ghost Coast to Coast*, *Sealab 2021* and *Harvey Birdman, Attorney at Law*. They were all cheaply made (using Illustrator files and manipulated in Photoshop), but had fun with characters that were familiar to audiences who were still in love with the Saturday morning cartoons they

Geeks Bearing Gifts

Cartoon Network's golden [adult swim] block continues to make a big splash as more new demented shows join the lineup. **by Ramin Zahed**

In 2006, as the culture wars continue to divide Americans, it's good to know that most of the country stands united behind one monolithical pop culture phenom: Cartoon Network's brilliant, outrageous and deranged [adult swim] programming block. The irreverent collection of adult-skewing toons have become such a huge pop culture hit that it's very hard to believe how we managed to laugh and entertain ourselves five years ago ... before *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* and *Sealab 2021* became our late-night companions.

The marketing team at CN love to send out weekly reminders to the press about how well the block is faring with the ad-friendly 18-34 audience (men 18-34 to be more specific). And yes, it usually ranks #1 across the board for total day delivery! Things certainly aren't going to slow down now that the hilarious

Minoriteam series has joined the Sunday mix and a second season of the popular stop-motion parody show *Robot Chicken* launched on April 2. Last month, the block added another half-hour to its lineup, now beginning 10:30 p.m., Monday thru Thursday and Saturday, and 10 p.m. on Sundays.

As Salon.com TV critic Heather Havrilesky asked in a review of *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, "What makes a cartoon milkshake so damn funny!?" We're still won-



Squidbillies



Keith Crofford



Dave Willis

watched as kids.

"We were hoping to stay on the air for 13 weeks which was the duration of our contract," says Crofford. "We really never dreamt that it would grow into such a huge thing. *Space Ghost* was an economical

new spin on those classic cartoons. We were happy to discover that there were a lot of people out there who were on the same humor wavelength as us. I guess people are as tired of seeing 50 nights of *C.S.I.* spin-offs as we were!"

In addition to the clever humor, another factor working in the block's favor is the length of the shows. "You don't need a long attention span," adds Crofford. "The shows are only 11-minutes long. It's not much of an investment really. *Robot Chicken* is even more sub-compartmentalized as the sketches are only two-to three-minutes long! If you don't like something, don't worry. It will be over soon and something new, better or worse will come on!"

The success of the block has led to related activities and ventures in different arenas. You can now pick up DVD collections of many of the titles including *Robot Chicken*, *Aqua Teen Hunger Force*, *Sealab 2021*, *Harvey Birdman*, *Attorney at Law* and *The Venture Brothers*. Fans can also get their hands on collectibles. (There are items such as the Aqua Teen reversible belt and the ever-popular Meat Wad plush toy on sale at www.adultswim.com.)

The website also offers seven full-length episodes of favorite original shows and select anime

Robot Chicken's Perfect Pecking Order

Robot Chicken masterminds Seth Green and Mat Senreich want the world to know that they'll continue their brave and noble mission to make fun of celebrities who take themselves way too seriously. The second season of the stop-motion parody show is back this month with more hilarious takes on the mad world of politicians, stars and other pop culture figures that annoy us day in and day out. Fidel Castro, Harry Potter and *The Golden Girls* are among the targets featured in the 10-episode season of the show. Plus, '80s-era stars Corey Haim and Corey Feldman are reunited in a segment called 'Corey and Corey Save the World!'

"I can't even begin to tell you how good the new season is," says Green, the popular 32-year-old actor who also provides

the voice for Chris Griffin on *The Family Guy*, and whose long list of theatrical and TV credits include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Without a Paddle*, *The Italian Job* and the NBC sitcom *Four Kings*. "We had more time to build stuff, the sets are better, there's an infusion of more ideas, we even added musical numbers—that's right, we have a sketch called 'Beastmaster: The Musical!'"



Mat Senreich and Seth Green play with dolls.

So what's the secret ingredient that makes this *Chicken* so juicy? Why have stars such as Wayne Brady, Christian Slater, Elijah Wood, Rick Schroeder, David Hasselhoff, and even the two Coreys said yes to playing along with the jokes? "We like to tackle material that people in our age group are fa-

miliar with, it's the nostalgia factor, the kind of inside jokes you have with your friends," says Green. "We also hit it fast and hard," adds Senreich. "Unlike shows like *Saturday Night Live* or *Mad TV*, we don't let a joke run its course. You get a nice variety of content in each episode."

The animation for the show is done in a studio in Los Angeles, where the team works with modified toys and collectible figures. From start to finish, each episode takes about a month to six weeks to produce. "The craziest thing about it is how supportive toy companies have been [of the show]," notes Green. "Palisades and Hasbro contact us to have their toys on the show. It's been so much fun. Basically, our mission is not to suck!" ■



The Boondocks

outings for 24/7 viewing on high-speed Internet connections every week under the Adult Swim Fix umbrella. In addition, fans can download behind-the-scenes promo sneaks of their favorite toons online. There's also a lot of buzz surrounding the *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* movie, which is slated for a 2006 release, although no definite time has been set for it yet.



The Venture Brothers

"It's a big year for us," says Dave Willis, who co-created *Aqua Teen Hunger Force* with Matt Maiellaro and *Squidbillies* with Maiellaro and Jim Fortier. "We're doing 10 new episodes of *Aqua Teen* and 14 episodes of *Squidbillies*. Then we have the *Aqua Teen* movie coming out some time this year, and there's also a Midway video game based on the show that we have great hopes for."

When pushed to reveal something about the movie, he says half-jokingly, "We're saying racism is bad! We know it's

going to win the Oscar. We wanted to deal with the same issues that *Crash* did. We're more against it!! Our movie is going to be more high-def!"

Not one to shy away from overdramatic statements, he adds, "For the new season of *Aqua Teen*, we're going to blow it up completely, rejecting everything we've done before. It's going to be more dramatic and there's a story arc that runs through it. We're rebuilding the characters and offering a lot of cliffhangers, just like *The Sopranos*!"

Willis says he's also having a great time with *Squidbillies*, thanks to the untapped potential of the show. "We're still trying to figure things out. It's the early days of the series, so you haven't written yourself into a corner. You can almost do anything and not be afraid of touching any subject material. The guy I'm writing it with, he and I grew up in the same town and went to high school together and we can relate to very specific redneck things. It's all a lot of fun."

So why does he

think the block has developed such a strong following? Willis says he thinks it's because there are so few interesting comedies on network TV right now. "There's not a whole lot out there. I like the new *Office* [on NBC], but that's about it and cable isn't that much better. Back when we were in school, all my peers and I were super excited about the possibilities that adult animation offered. Back then, I was very much into David Letterman, and he did all sorts of insane things five nights a week after Carson. We have the same mentality. Some of it is great, and if some of it is not funny, we hope it's always interesting."

Both Willis and many of the other members of the creative team at [adult Swim] give credit to Matt Parker and Trey Stone who continue to push the envelope on Comedy Central's *South Park* and raise the ire of celebrities, the thought police and religious fundamentalists on a weekly basis. "It's amazing what a big role animation is playing in

continued on page 30



A Harvey Birdman collectible, a Venture Brothers bag, Aqua Teen belt and Robot Chicken DVD can be bought on the [adult swim] website.



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adult swim

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our culture today," says Willis. "Look at *South Park*: It doesn't matter what your opinion of the show is ... you just can't deny that they broke major ground with the standards folks about what you can and what you can't do. The FCC might want to rein that in. Nobody wants to do a cartoon of the prophet Mohammed, but everything else is fair game!"

Crofford agrees with Willis and notes, "When we look at ideas for new shows on [adult swim], we look for things that are different, absurdist, bizarre or unexpected. Of course, they have to be funny. If it amuses us and if it amuses most of the people here in our Williams Street offices [downtown Atlanta, Georgia], then it's a go."

More than anything else, however, it's the passion behind the ideas that matters most, says Crofford. "If you've got an OK idea, and you're 500 percent behind it, keep an open mind," he notes. "Be open to collaboration and just go for it. Remember that everything is cyclical and it's all about valleys and peaks. We're just grateful to be living at a time when there's so much good work out there: I still think *The Simpsons* is the greatest show on TV. *Family Guy* is still huge for us even after it has had its third rebirth. It's good to see that people are willing to give animation a chance again." And let's not forget what

Harvey Birdman,
Attorney at Law

this whole cultural craze has done for milkshake cups, meat wads and French fries all over the world. ■

[Adult Swim] airs Mondays thru Thursdays and Saturdays at 10:30 p.m. and Sundays at 10 p.m.

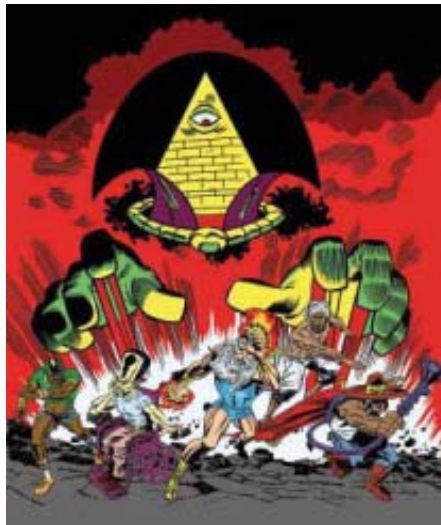
Fighting Stereotypes in Heroic, Twisted Ways

You've got to have big *cojones* to have a show about superheroes with names like Dr. Wang, Jewcano, Fasto and El Jefe. These characters are the stars of *Minoriteam*, the newest twisted ingredient in the [adult swim] late-night stew. Created by Adam de la Pena, Todd James and Peter Girardi, the 15-minute show centers on a team of ethnic superheroes—led by the wheelchair-bound math genius Dr. Wang. There's the speedy Fasto, the powerful Jewcano, Non-Stop, the alter-ego of former pro skater Dave Raj, who can't be shot, and oil billionaire Richard Escartin, who wields a supercharged leaf-blower which lets him fly through space and time. Oh, and did we mention that the team members use racial stereotypes to fight the evil adversaries known as the White Shadow, the Corporate Ladder, the Standardized Test and Racist Frankenstein?

The creative forces behind the show have a strong background in working on edgy, off-the-wall projects such as *The Man Show* and *Jimmy Kimmel Live* and the digital entertainment company, Funny Garbage. All three worked on the Comedy Central show *Crank Yankers*: de la Pena was a writer, James was a puppet designer and Peter was a production designer.

"The Marvel cartoons were a huge influence for us," says James. "Sure they were more like glorified animatics back then, but part of the humor in our show comes from how silly that animation is."

It's important, however, that viewers see the show not as a parody but as an homage to the likes of the great Marvel artist Jack Kirby. "We are incredibly ear-



From left, creators Todd James, Adam de la Pena and Peter Girardi



nest and have a lot of respect and admiration for those classics. We all grew up reading comic books," adds Girardi.

Girardi says he tries to stay away from political correctness, but they don't like to be outrageous just to shock audiences. "These superheroes take on these stereotypes, and we are using them in a completely different way."

Minoriteam's animation is done in-house at a Cartoon Network studio in Hollywood. Photoshop and After Effects tools are used to animate hand-drawn images, in a limited way to mimic the early Marvel toons from the '60s.

The creators praise Cartoon Network's Mike Lazzo and Keith Crofford for the ease of the show's development process. "They know exactly what they're doing," says de la Pena. "They give you these small pointers that can actually help you. [adult swim] really picks up shows that nobody else will do." Girardi chimes in, "There's no giant artifice and they talk right to the audience. We've pitched shows to other networks and the guy or girl in charge has never watched a cartoon before, but over at [adult swim], they really respect the audience. You can look at it as the first cable network that actually involves the viewers like the Internet or a chat-room. The viewer becomes part of the show." ■

Minoriteam airs Sundays at midnight on Cartoon Network's [adult swim].

Executive Suite

2D Digital Grows Up



by Scott Dyer

Five years ago, television animation was produced using traditional techniques—artists at drawing tables, flipbooks and overseas in-betweening. The coloring of the images was done by computer (Digital ink-and-paint is about 10 years old now.), but otherwise there was little difference between an animator's job in 1995 and his or her job in 1935.

The advent of digital animation—both 2D and 3D—changed all of that.

The origins of 2D digital animation stretch all the way back to 1963, when a Ph.D. dissertation written by Ivan Sutherland first presented the idea of representing an image as a series of *line drawing instructions*. These *instructions* could be scaled, rotated and transformed without any loss of detail, and the resulting image could be created on the fly by computing hardware. This idea is central to Macromedia Flash, which led the animation revolution on the internet and eventually found its way into television production.

Flash animation for television first emerged in 1998 or 1999, and the airwaves are thick with 2D digital shows today. Shows ranging from *Max & Ruby* to *Gerald McBoing Boing* to *iMucha Lucha!* are all produced using digital animation techniques, based either on Macromedia Flash, Toon Boom Animation's Harmony or other programs. With these new tools, animators could combine design, color, layout, posing, animation, paint and compositing into a single step.

Nelvana invested early in 2D digital, and we're true believers. Our first digital shows were done

in Macromedia Flash (*Quads* in 2001, *Max & Ruby* in 2002, *Jacob Two-Two* in 2003), and we expanded our in-house production intranet to accommodate the 2D digital workflow. Since then, we've built a full, web-based production management system that supports both in-studio work as well as remote animators and designers and includes approvals, reshoots and most aspects of animation from storyboard to post. We've even licensed this intranet externally to assist other companies using Flash as their production medium.

In 2004, we became an investor in Toon Boom Animation, and since that time, we've worked with them to refine their software to meet the unique needs of 2D digital animation. The opportunity to help them create a custom animation

tool, designed with animators in mind, was exciting creatively as well as an effective cost-management tool for our productions.

Television production remains a difficult business, with reduced license fees and limited premier channel space in major markets. 2D digital provides a cost-effective mechanism for production in this environment. While there are significant benefits for the North American studios that can now repatriate some of their animation work at an attractive cost, the biggest beneficiaries are the larger over-

seas studios. They can now apply their skilled work forces to the more interesting (creatively and technically) problem of producing animation, both on a service basis and for domestic consumption.

We have about eight years of 2D digital history behind us now, and it is safe to say that the medium will only continue growing.

Many studios are producing excellent, expressive, character-driven animation using the tools, and the line between "traditional" animation and 2D digital is blurring.

We can all thank Ivan Sutherland for his innovation some 45 years ago. ■

Scott Dyer is the exec VP of production and development at Toronto-based animation studio Nelvana.

Gerald McBoing Boing



Max & Ruby



Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends



Pets Gone Wild

Nelvana develops a new preschool toon based on Dan Yaccarino's charming book about a feisty little girl and the wild animals that share her home. **by Ramin Zahed**

If you've ever leafed through a Dan Yaccarino book or watched his popular preschool show *Oswald* on Noggin, you know that he's a true American original. Praised for his brilliant jelly-bean colors, his retro design scheme and his charming children's books that stick with you no matter how old you are, the New York-based author/illustrator/TV producer is ready to launch a new animated series, produced by Toronto studio Nelvana.

The 26X30 toon is called *Willa's Wild Life* and centers on a charming six-year-old girl who lives with her dad and insists on bringing all kinds of animals home to live with them. "She's a little red-haired girl with a big personality," says Irene Weibel, Nelvana's VP of development and the show's exec producer. "Her dad has a hard time saying no to her, so they have animals like penguins, giraffes, elephants and seals

living with them!" Weibel also likens her heroine to another red-head, Lucy Ricardo. "She is nice and means well, but chaos always seems to follow her!" explains Weibel, who discovered the property in its book form under the title *An Octopus Followed Me Home*. "She also has that affinity with animals, a bit like Christopher Robin in the Winnie the Pooh books."

Yaccarino remembers the exact time he actually came up with the idea of the show. "I remember I was at this performance with my wife, and to be honest, I was very bored, so I looked at the program and discreetly scribbled some ideas on it," says the author. "The ideas were all about this little girl who keeps dragging these huge animals home and they all end up being integrated at this kid's home."

After he fleshed out the story, Yaccarino also wanted it be a sort of homage to the wonderful Little Golden Books he was fond of as a kid. "I was fortunate to do a Little Golden Book recently, and it was a great honor," he notes. "That's what I mostly think about when I want to write a book or create a TV series. It's all about what I would enjoy, what did I like to watch as a kid!"

Weibel is certainly on the same wavelength. "The most important thing to me when

I look at a property is does it tell a compelling story for kids? Is it unique in the marketplace? Although Willa didn't have a name in the book, she was such a great character that you knew she could carry a show. You combine that with a great design, and you're very lucky when you have those two

elements in one show."

It's also about presenting a great story. "We are all drawn to great stories, even if you're two years old!"

The preschool crowd will certainly get a big kick

out of the menagerie of animals Willa entertains at home. There's Jenny the Giraffe, Coco the Kangaroo, the elephants Dinky and Ro, the penguins Inky, Blinky and Bob (who live in the freezer), Samuel the Camel and, a couple of seals known as Steve and Eydie!

According to Weibel, one of the central themes of the series is that everyone has a different learning style and a different personality. "Some of the animals are childlike and some are adults," she notes. "For example, Jenny the Giraffe is more like a substitute. We embrace the fact that everyone doesn't learn or communicate the same way."

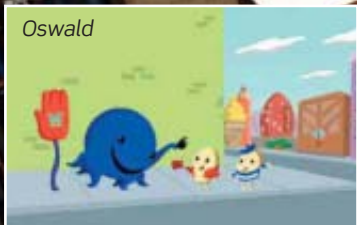
"I believe in creating things for kids that are in the highest



Dan Yaccarino
in his New York
studio.



Oswald



caliber," says Yaccarino. "I don't think you can slack off just because you're writing for kids. I want the show to be as beautiful and stylish as can be. We've come up with some great motifs and backgrounds for the show. I also want the writing to be sharp and entertaining on different levels, because both kids and their parents are watching the shows. You can also make the show more palatable with the voice casting and the music."

The author and illustrator of over 30 children's books (including *Good Night, Mr. Night*; *Unlovable* and *Zoom! Zoom! Zoom! I'm Off to the Moon!*), Yaccarino is very hands-on when it comes to producing a TV show. "He created

Oswald for Nick and he was very involved with that project. He's a very detailed producer," says Weibel. Before entering the children's TV world, Yaccarino produced a couple of animated commercials, but *Oswald* taught him about the day-to-day challenges of overseeing an animated show. "It was a huge learning curve for me," says Yaccarino. "At this point, I've become far more sure of what I'm doing. Now I know if you hire someone to do x, I know exactly what they'll be doing."

At MIPTV, a two-minute promo of



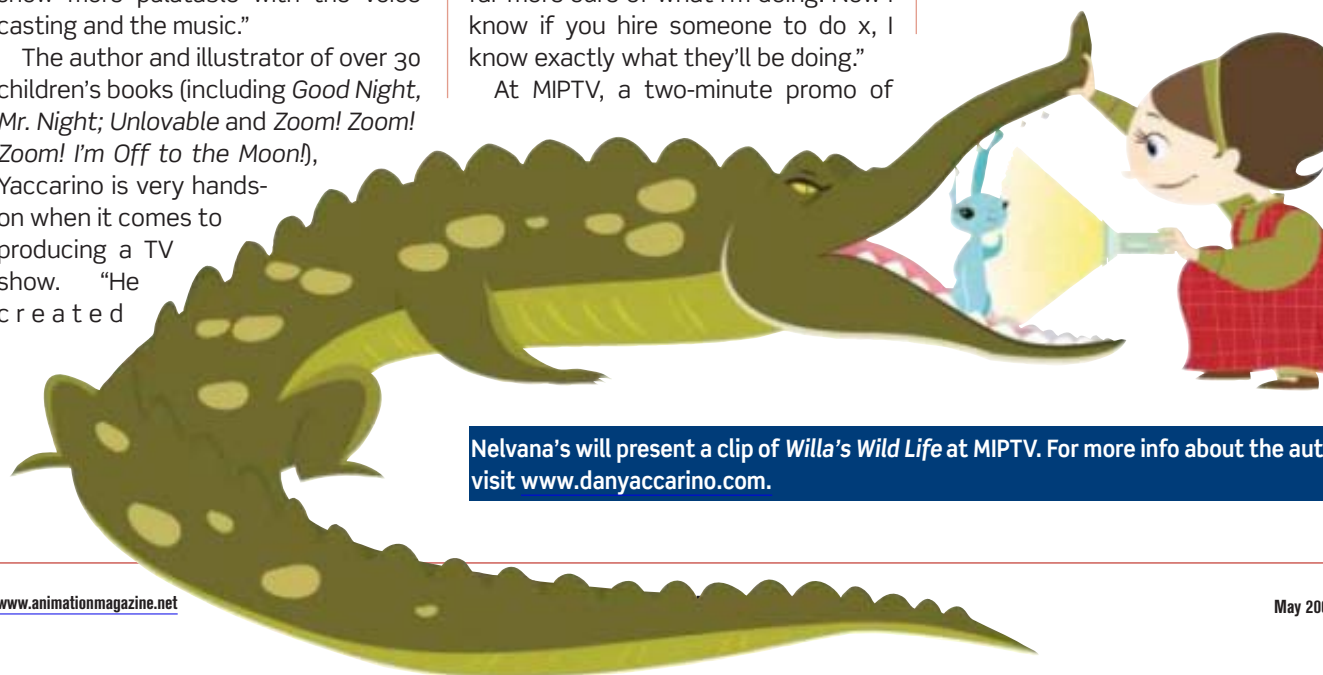
Irene Weibel

the show will be available for prospective international buyers and partners. The producers believe that the show will be animated in 2D digital, using Toon Boom's

popular animation software.

No matter how many viewers discover the show in the years to come, there's one five-year-old girl who can't wait for the toon to be completed. That's Lucy, Yaccarino's daughter, who is both the inspiration and target audience for the toon. "She has the ability to wrap me around her fingers," says Yaccarino. "Just like the book, her father does anything she wants her to. She also adores animals and we often go the Bronx zoo or the San Diego zoo when we're in California."

Of course, life has a way of cramping art's style, because Yaccarino is allergic to cats and dogs. "We will be taking Lucy to the pet store in a week or so for her birthday, but I have a feeling that we may end up with either a parakeet or a goldfish—nothing with fur!" Then, he pauses for a bit and adds, "Just to let you know, I had *many* pets growing up: fish, parakeets, a parrot, a snake, a chameleon, mice, hamsters, gerbils, guinea pigs, cats and a terrier who gave birth to 11 healthy puppies on Christmas morning, 1972!" Now Willa would definitely approve of that! ■



Nelvana's will present a clip of *Willa's Wild Life* at MIPTV. For more info about the author, visit www.danyaccarino.com.

The Padded Cel

Demagogues in
Researchers' Clothing

by Robby London

One of the special qualities of animation is how it can delight children by defying laws of science and logic. One of the special qualities of animation research is how it can delight advocacy groups and politicians by defying those very same laws! Take the latest "research" trumpeted by He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Named and the Death Eaters (known to muggles as Brent Bozell and his Parents Television Council). Yes, the Voldemort of censorship recently foisted upon the media yet another "study" vilifying children's television by purporting to measure "violence." (Never mind that most of it was devoted to dialogue and supposedly offensive portrayals of humor and character conflict.)

We support legitimate, objective research. But, really just how scientific would you expect a study to be that is titled "Wolves In Sheep's Clothing?" (Apparently they hope to publish in the prestigious *Journal of Incredibly Clichéd and Prejudicial Metaphors*.) The subtitle is "We Get Funding By Saying Kids' TV Sucks So Don't Confuse Us With The Facts." Okay, I'm making up the latter. But I'm *not* kidding about the former. Nor am I fabricating the COVER of this "objective study"—which portrays an evil wolf's eye reflecting the innocent child prey it is about to devour—right near the "Hollywood" sign! I have just one thing to say about "Wolves In Sheep's Clothing": Baa-Baa! (Or would that be two things?)

The study pays lip service to separating "violence" into categories ranging from cartoony to more realistic. And yet, it simply tal-



Illustration by Mercedes Milligan

lies the number of alleged incidents in each of these categories and publishes them with equal weight—and with only a small number of specific citations and examples. Moreover, by implication, "violence" is equated with bad taste. As the headline in *The Washington Post* read: "Violence! Violence! Violence! Burps! Nose Picking!"

Unfortunately, other publications were not so tongue-in-cheek. "Children's TV Studded With Dark Acts," "Kids' TV More Violent Than Prime Time," "Cartoons Loaded With Violence," screamed the headlines. This in reference to shows like *Totally Spies* and *Teen Titans*. And *Rugrats* was cited for "the infusion of bathroom humor in children's programs as well as themes of disobedience and disrespect." Wow, my cable reception must be worse than I thought—I'm missing all the good stuff!

I'm not qualified to deconstruct this research comprehensively because 1) due to

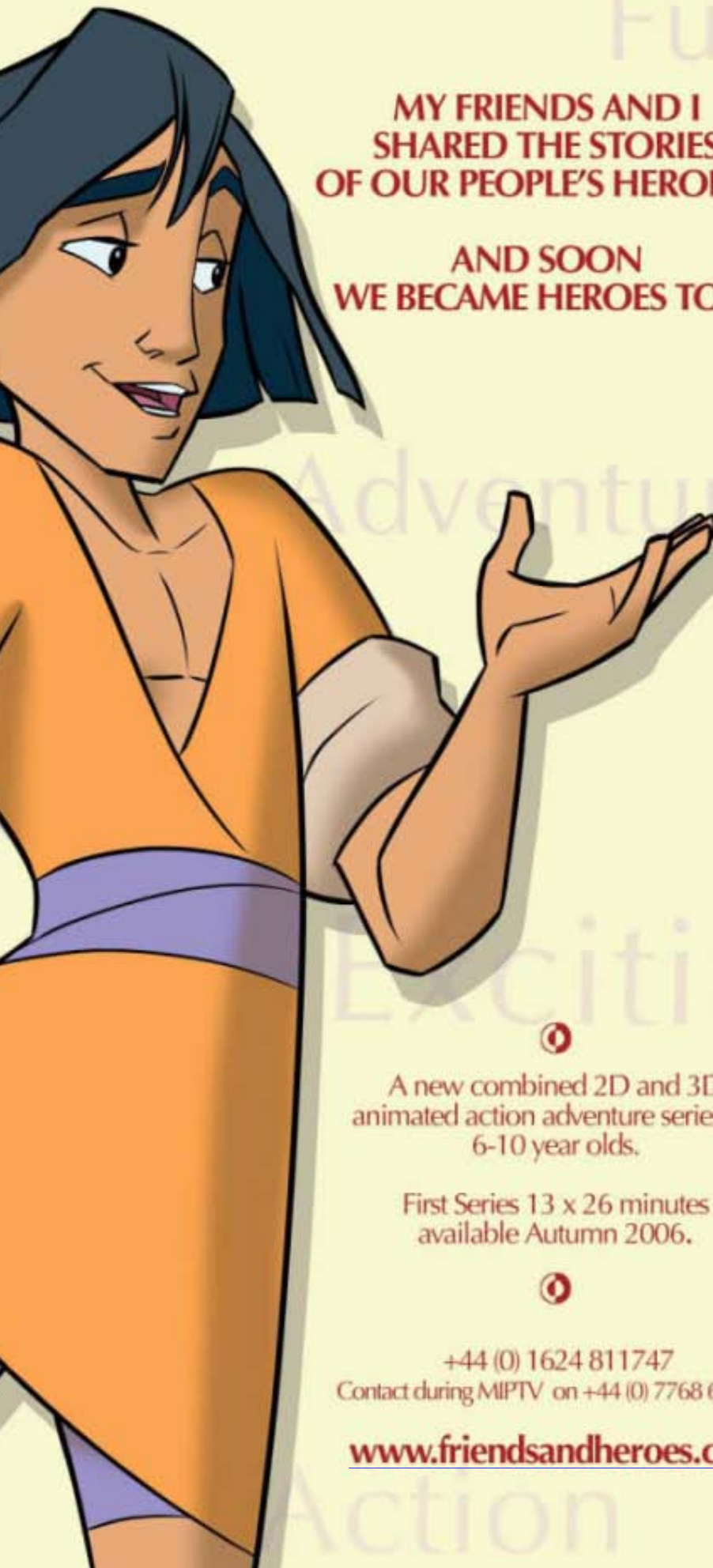
the influence of cartoons, I was so busy throwing spitballs in class that I flunked statistics, 2) I am a convicted burper and nose-picker (I was framed!) and 3) this column has an agenda: to be funny. (Okay, so it's a *hidden* agenda.)

But it is funny that a country spending more on its military than the rest of humanity combined is obsessed with protecting children from cartoons. (I mean that as "funny" *suicidally depressing*, not "funny" *haha*.) And my research proves conclusively that

such lunacy only serves to foment "research rage." ("Mommy, the kids at school called me a violence-mongering sissy!" "So how did you respond, Robby?" "I hit them with their study!")

With the midterm elections around the corner, just as predictably as another Cher "Farewell" Tour, count on candidates to trot out their beloved, favorite, absolutely *fail-safe* target: children's television. Because ONLY A MONSTER would dare question "protecting our children from exposure to violence!" I'd volunteer to be that monster, but right now I'm on my way to meet some fellow animation producers to check out the new spring line of sheep's clothing at Nordstrom Rack. Or would that be Nordstrom Rack of Lamb? ■

Robby London is an animation industry veteran who has checked himself in at the Toon Time Happy Home for Stressed-Out Professionals for the rest of the month.



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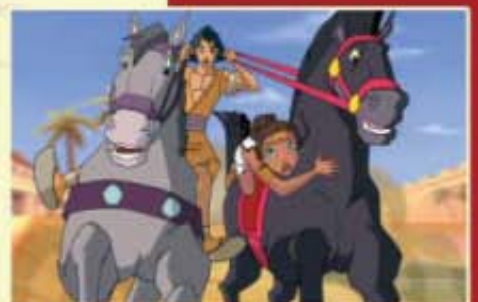
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Swimming in a Sea of Content

The number of animated shows competing for global audiences is up at this year's MIPTV market.

It's the first week in April, and that means thousands of TV execs, buyers and producers are at the MIPTV market in Cannes (April 3-7). Not only are AOL CEO Jonathan Miller, BBC's new media director Ashley Highfield, Microsoft, Windows Media general manager Eric Huggers and *Survivor* mastermind Mark Burnett delivering keynote speeches, there are numerous new animated shows from all over the world ready to meet audiences. You can learn more about the event at www.miptv.com. Here are a few tidbits that caught our eyes:

KOL's Equine Adventuress

Former schoolteacher Stephanie Cohen had noticed how much young kids loved

to watch TV shows and movies about horses. She looked at the popularity of movies like *Dreamer* and timeless classics such as *Black Beauty* and realized that it was a good time to create an animated preschool property centered on an adventurous equine heroine. That's how KOL's

(AOL's Kids Channel) new series *Pilar's Adventures* came to be.

In the 10X5 series, a young inquisitive horse shows her animal pals—Cleg the Horsefly, Hampshire the Pig and Susa the Owl—that you can have a lot of fun simply by using your imagination.

"The biggest challenge for me was translating the vision in my head for what the show would be do the animators that would bring it to life," says Cohen, who is also the programming director for KOL and KOL Jr. "I'm proud to say that each episode has brought my vision to life in a way I didn't even imagine was possible!"

The Flash-animated series is co-produced by New York studio Animation Collective, which also delivers other KOL shows such as *Princess Natasha*, *SKWOD* and *Kung Fu Academy* as well as Nicktoon's new series *Kappa Mikey*. You can view the show on KOL Jr. (www.koljunior.com). The producers will also bring the preschool show to this month's MIPTV market in France. We were going to make a joke about the show having legs here, but quickly thought against it.

Toon Boom Makes Digital Storyboarding a Dream

We've written about the numerous applications of the **Toon Boom** software in these pages before, but now we hear that the Montreal-based company will release a new digital storyboarding companion tool this month. This new application has a panel-based system, as used by traditional storyboard artists, and all the tools necessary to create an



entirely digital storyboard as well as additional ones to support the construction of animatics.

The user interface will contain settings for basic and advanced toolsets, with the basic setting providing an easy-to-use interface with the ability to perform basic operations right away (create/import a drawing, add/delete panels, etc). The design should support nearly all operations using just a pen/tablet, which will allow users to work on hardware such as the Wacom Cintiq with a minimum amount of keyboard use, or without keyboard use at all.

"The new digital storyboard raises the bar as it is fully vector-based, can integrate camera moves to create animatics, export to SWF and offers customizable text fields," says Joan Vogelesang, president and CEO of Toon Boom. "This tool is designed for all types of story tellers, with a special interest in storyboard artists. Designed in conjunction with Nelvana to meet their needs, we are confident this new companion tool will be a perfect fit for other studios as well, whether they produce animation or live action.

Toon Boom's Digital Storyboard will be showcased at MIPTV, Booth C1.05 and at NAB, Booth C10512.

DIC Enters a New Horse Race

Andy Heyward is ready to plunk some major money down on a new horse race. The busy chairman and CEO of L.A.-based **DIC Entertainment** is singing the praises of *Horseland* these days. His new animated venture is a 26X30 series based on the super-popular web community (www.horseland.com) where kids can buy, sell, train and race virtual studs and compete with themselves and other users. It's quite a different world from DIC's most recent offering, *Trollz* which airs on Fox stations nationwide.

"All little girls love horses," explains Heyward. "It's a never-fail pattern. Look at what happened to *Barbie* with *Bratz*. I predict the same thing is going to happen with *My Little Pony*. *Horseland* skews slightly older, and it has few million members on its online community. I consider it the jewel of our upcoming schedule.

Horseland will debut as part of the new DIC programming block this fall titled "CBS's Secret Saturday Morning Slumber Party." DIC will provide three hours of FCC-friendly children's programming to CBS, using new shows such as *Horseland* as well as favorites from the DIC library, which includes titles like *Archie's Weird Mysteries*, *Sabrina: The Animated Series* and *Strawberry Shortcake*.

Heyward says these days, it's impossible to make five-year strategic plans, because of the quickly evolving nature of technology and how it affects the entertainment business. "The velocity of change is too great," he notes. "We're all trying to learn how to adapt like everyone else. It's clear that you can't just throw three hours of programming together anymore. There are online communities and new technologies that immediately connect kids to the shows. Broadly speaking, our business plans require a variety of different income streams: It's not just TV anymore and you have to have plans in place for consumer products, DVDs, toys, publishing, podcasts, etc."

DIC is also developing a new direct-to-DVD series with billionaire investor Warren Buffett. *The Secret Millionaire's Club* will consist of 13 titles that promote financial literacy to kids through relatable characters and real-world situations. At MIPTV, the company will be shopping a new CG-animated feature titled *Strawberry Shortcake: Sweet Dreams*, and a 2D adventures series called *Kid Clones*. For more info, visit. www.dicentertainment.com.



Private (Bug) Eye

Watch out, Sam Spade. There's a new bug gumshoe in town that could give you a run for your money, buddy. This dude's a beetle named **Bug Muldoon** and he fights crime in a garden patch threatened by the sinister Cockroach Slade and some nasty wasps. Muldoon is the CG-animated star of his own six million euro movie and an upcoming 26x30 TV series, produced by Europool, Magma Films and Pictorian **Magma Animation** in Germany.

The movie and TV projects are based on the best-selling books by Paul Shipton, *Bug Muldoon and the Garden of Fear* (1995) and *Bug Muldoon and the Killer in the Rain* (2000). "It's a character-driven story with a wonderful hero (Bug Muldoon), a funny sidekick (Sugar Jake) and also a gorgeous character like the sweet flee child Netta which make the movie a true family film," says Ralph Christians, chairman and founder of Magma Films. "Mostly I love Bug's big soft heart under the tough shell."

The *Bug Muldoon* trailer got a huge response



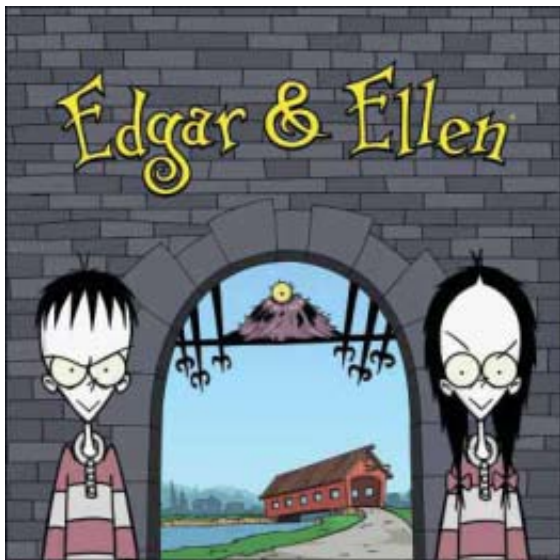
at this year's Cartoon Movie event and the production team is optimistic that they'll be able to deliver the movie in early 2008. The series finds the movie's main characters involved in day-to-day dilemmas in the garden, which sometimes involved human's interference in the lives of our lead insects. The show, which has an estimated budget of six to seven million euros, is targeted at six- to 12-year-olds and is expected to be delivered in '08.

And how does Christians feel about the Euro animation scene? "I think we can do better," he says. "There are around 750 feature films released in Europe every year, and less than ten of them are animated." The toon veteran has a very helpful piece of advice for anyone who wants to get into the business: "Become a lawyer!"

Mischief-Making Twins

If you watched Nicktoons last Halloween, you might already know **Edgar & Ellen**, the delightfully wicked anti-hero hosts of the cabler's Scare-A-Thon. The good news is that a Nick UK and ABC TV Australia have picked up a TV series and six specials starring the duo, created by Chicago-based **Star Farm Productions**.

The property has already developed quite a following thanks to the Edgar & Ellen books and their online community. "What makes this property different is that we embed layers of the story in each media," says Star Farm CEO Patricia Lindsay. "The six books published by Simon and Schuster provide the back story for the main characters, but leaves readers with cliffhangers that won't be resolved until the release of the feature films."



The six TV special continue to develop the characters even further, says Lindsay, while the spring 2007 TV series will focus on "a day in the life" stories of Edgar, Ellen, Pet, their arch-enemy Stephanie Knighleigh and all their fellow Nodslimbsians. "Basically, the arts of the story that are told in animation vary by the distribution channel," she adds. "We believe that the future is storytelling in multiple media. Distribution channels will continue to evolve and they'll need stories that reflect how each media is used. The magic comes in leveraging technology to empower our audiences to create content." You can learn more about the clever twins on www.edgarandellen.com.

This Taffy Keeps On Stretching

We would tell you about all the numerous shows **Taffy Entertainment** (the distrib arm of Mike Young Productions and MoonScoop) is bringing to the market, but then, we'd have to leave out everything else in the magazine. Taffy has secured pre-market deals for the new MYP show **I Got A Rocket!**, debuting at this year's MIPTV. Nickelodeon (Australia), KI.KA (Germany) and Ten Network (Australia) have already purchased the rights to air 52 eleven-minute episodes of MYP's newest show offering.

Set in a graphic urban environment, *I Got A Rocket!* is described as a fresh, fun animated series aimed at six to 11 year-olds.

"We are also excited to launch 26x26 episodes of *Fantastic Four*, which is a Marvel co-production with the participation of M6 and Cartoon Network," says Lionel Marty, exec VP of sales and acquisitions at Taffy. The show will

premiere on CN in the fall. "One of the key issues that we feel makes our slate stand out is that we have properties that have a proven track record across multi-media platforms."

In addition, Taffy plans to debut new MYP original shows

Growing Up Creepie and *Dive Olly Dive!* Also on offer at the market: *Cosmic Quantum Ray*, *El Corazon*, *Jakers! The Adventures of Piggley Winks* (Season 3), *Pet Alien* (Season 2) and *ToddWorld* (Season 2).



Preschool Confidential

"I don't have a TiVo and I still can't get my VCR to record properly, which suits me well considering I prefer the spontaneity of watching cartoons as they air, just like kids do," says our friend, Sam Ewing, **Cookie Jar's** VP of sales and co-productions. You've got to love the man for his heart-felt honesty and directness.

Cookie Jar's beautifully animated 2D show **Caillou** was recently picked up for its fourth season on PBS Kids Stateside. In the new season, the young star of the toon leaves the comforts of his home and neighborhood and heads to that exotic place known as preschool. The show continues to be a reliable fixture on PBS, TELETOON (Canada), Super RTL (Germany) and RTP (Portugal) and several other territories.

Ewing says there is truly something for everyone at the market this year. "So many choices, but so little time," he adds, "There are more channels, new buyers and a healthy economy. Everyone can see the potential new platforms have created in the animation industry. A kid can watch his favorite series, play the game online, wear the t-shirt, trade the cards and still make it to band practice!"



A Flashback to 68 A.D.

David Dorricto, exec producer of the new animated series **Friends & Heroes** is on a mission: He wants to bring some of the exciting stories of the Bible to life for young people. "So many children don't know or understand some of the most basic stories of the Bible, yet these are the foundation stones of much of western culture," he notes. "Our show goes to amazing lengths to re-tell these famous tales in an exciting, relevant and timely way—and also, to achieve an authentic interpretation of life in Roman times."

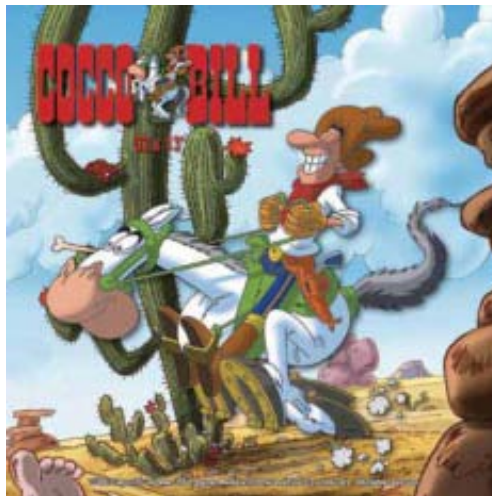
Dorricto says his team has created an innovative mix of a 2D adventure story, with high quality inserts to add



dramatic impact. The 39x30 series is produced in the Isle of Man in conjunction with The CharacterShop 3D animation studio. "I think that many parents are concerned that children be excited, entertained and informed in a way which is relevant to the world in which we live today. Many series seem to ignore the need to inspire the next generation in a positive way." Now that's something even Davey and Goliath would agree with. For more info, visit www.friendsandheroes.com.

Crazy for Cocco

Connoisseurs of fine international comic books may already know Benito Jacovitt's cool cowboy, **Cocco Bill**. He's a quick-tempered gunslinger who owns a talking horse named Sloetrott (Trottaleme in Italian) and does his best to defend what's right in the wild, wild west! The famous cowboy is the star of his own animated series, thanks to the folks at Hong Kong's **Agogo** Corporation, who recently sold the 105x15 package to China Central Television (CCTV). Co-produced by De Mas & Partners, S.r.L and Agogo Media, the show will also be available at MIPTV for sale (Stand #14.22). Under Steven Ching's direction, Agogo has produced over 1,200 half-hours of TV animation in the past decade. If you're in Cannes, don't miss this chance to meet the animated cowboy. We're still trying to figure out whether we want Jake Gyllenhaal or Heath Ledger to play Cocco in the live-action version!



Two Italian Brothers Visit Toon Town



At each market, there's always one show that captures the eyes because it's quite different from all the others. This year, the prize goes to Gruppo Alcu-

ni's innovative 26x10 series, ***And Yet It Moves***. Shot in High-Def, the series is a fun hybrid of live-action and 2D animation. It was created by Francesco and Sergio Manfio, who also play the two lead human roles in the project. In the first few episodes, the Manfio brothers help the Big Bad Wolf get a character makeover. In the process, they teach the kids at home the secrets of making animated shows, such as developing facial expressions and adding voice-overs to toons. Subsequent episodes find their peaceful lives in Cartoon World threatened by the Wicked Witch from *Sleeping Beauty* and some jealous alien visitors from space!

And Yet It Moves is a great collaboration between Gruppo Alcuini, which is based in Treviso, Italy, and its co-producers, Indian house **DQ Entertainment** (which works on most of the animation) as well as Rai Fiction and MnoGo Film in Italy. Our hats off to everyone involved. We hope Roger Rabbit makes a guest appearance one of these days.



A Rush of Adrenalini

Bejuba! Entertainment president Tatiana Kober is optimistic about the upcoming year. "Business is looking up," she says. "There's a buzz in the air and that's exciting." We think her positive outlook may have something to do with the three daredevil siblings revving for action on her MIPTV slate. Bejuba's ***The Amazing Adrenalini Brothers!***, a co-production with Pesky and Studio B, launched on the U.K.'s ITV on January 7 and is set to hit YTV in Canada this spring. Cartoon Network also welcomed the brothers to their broadcast homes in Latin America, Europe, Asia and the U.S. So yes, it certainly seems that there's a buzz in the air, especially for those under the influence of *Adrenalini*.

The 26 x half hour Flash-animated series (each episode features three seven-minute shorts) introduces the high flying and fearless Adrenalini brothers, Xan, Adi and Erik, who are on a mission to amaze the world with their spectacular feats. They have left



their home in Rendoosia and only speak their native tongue so their brute force does most of the talking. "The series is different as the language is to a minimum and the action is extreme," Kober notes. "It springs from a short series, to show that shorts still can be turned into long form series. The mobile/downloadable possibilities are huge."

Bejuba! also has the child superstar series *Ricky Sprocket*, another co-production with Studio B, on its Cannes line-up this year. We're sure their animated performers will make a fine showing. For more information visit www.bejuba.com. ■

Trials and Tribulations of a Mini Royal

The Illuminated Film Company and TV-Loonland join forces to create an animated series based on the popular *Little Princess* books. **by Ramin Zahed**

The central character of author Tony Ross' *Little Princess* series will seem oddly familiar to anyone who's been around kids of a certain age. The cute four-year-old is very energetic, curious, playful and prone to loud temper tantrums when things don't go exactly her way!

"Anybody who is a parent or knows young children well will see in her elements of their own kid," says award-winning animation producer Iain Harvey, who is working on a new animated series based on the property. "What Tony manages to do is capture from a child's perspective the apparent illogic of the adult world, and a child's need for order. What's more, he puts in a highly humorous slant, which gives us ample opportunities to develop in particular the visual humor with Princess' pets, Scruff and Puss."

Harvey has played a huge role in the animation industry in the U.K. for the past few decades. Not only did he exec produce the award-winning specials *The Snowman* and *When the Wind Blows*, he is also the man behind the acclaimed *T.R.A.N.S.I.T.* short and more recently, *Christmas Carol—The Movie* and *War Game*. As the founder and managing director of The Illuminated Company, he is co-producing the show with TV-Loonland, the studio behind such high-profile shows as *The Cramp Twins*, *Metalheads* and *Dragon's Rock*.

"We have adopted and embraced the *Little Princess* even if she is a cheeky little girl and quite a handful," says Olivier Dumont, COO of TV-Loonland. "We're all confident that the endearing designs and wonderfully en-

gaging and funny stories will ensure that the series becomes a TV classic."

According to Harvey, the actual production of the 30 episodes will be spread over 12 months. "That's because we're doing it all in our own studio in downtown West London," he notes. "I have a great belief in keeping control over the animation process as I still like to think it is a creative art no matter how pressurized budgets and schedules become."

Harvey gives credit to the wonderful CelAction software which has allowed many U.K.-based studios great flexibility and a smooth production pipeline. He adds, "For the first series, inevitably there are a lot of set-up costs so the ballpark cost per episode is some \$125,000."

The producer is quick to praise the work of his development team: Cas Willing and Alison Gentleman, director Ed Foster (*Anna Spud*) and animation director Roger Mainwood, who directed episodes of the TVC *The World of Peter Rabbit and Friends* series. He praises the hard-working animation community in the

U.K. in general. "It has always amazed me how much animation talent there is in the U.K.," says Harvey. "Channel 4 certainly acted as a catalyst in the '80s and '90s, and I just hope that they realize how much they would benefit once again from that role. How young animators and artists secure a career now I just don't know, but the likes of Aardman, Astley Baker, Collingwood O'Hare and Cosgrove Hall are certainly doing their best to give new talent every opportunity."

Harvey joins a chorus of voices when he talks about the challenges of securing financing for his shows these days. "Why broadcasters can't see the

importance of having good children's programming baffles me!" he says. "Wasn't it the Jesuits who said, 'Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man'? And I do feel that broadcasters should think much more strategically than sometimes seems to be the case. However, the support that I have received from Channel 5, ZDF and the Scandinavian broadcasters has been strong, immediate and consistent."

So who does Harvey turn to when he is seeking inspiration? "If I had to isolate one or two, then I would list—apart from the more obvious choices such as *The Yellow Submarine*, *The Simpsons* and my dear old *Flintstones*—such masterpieces as *The Iron Giant* and *Spirited Away*. In the live-action film category, I would have to mention Peter Sellers and *Dr. Strangelove* and almost any film by Kurosawa!" ■

Produced by The Illuminated Film Company and TV-Loonland, *Little Princess* (30x11) will make its debut at the MIPTV market this month.



Under a New Toon Trance in France

More French animation studios are eyeing the global market in '06. by Rebecca Leffler

PARIS Pépé Le Pew must be smiling as the French TV animation market begins tooning up for a successful year in 2006 and a strong presence at the upcoming MIPTV market. While popular American cartoons such as *SpongeBob SquarePants* and *Dora the Explorer* are still getting top ratings in Gaul, the French sector has established itself as a powerful force both domestically and overseas. Cartoon co-productions are becoming more and more ubiquitous as demonstrated by new TV toons such as *Shuriken School* (Xilam) and *Team Galaxy* (Marathon). French animation companies are also branching out to new platforms such as mobile, podcasting and webcasting.

Many are enjoying success across the Atlantic as French-produced series invade television screens all over the United States. According to Mathieu Béjot, executive director of TV France International, "We are building an industry in France that encompasses all facets, all walks of life in the animation world." So what are some of the French animation studios hiding under their berets?

At this year's MIPTV, Marathon will launch the first completed episode of *Team Galaxy*

(52x26), a co-production with France 3, Rai, YTV and Jetix Europe. The show takes place 20 years in the future in a unique space school where students are trained to become space marshals. *Team Galaxy* follows three of these students, Yoko, Josh and Brett, as they study alien languages, galactic fighting techniques and interstellar geography. The show has been pre-sold to Nickelodeon Asia, Cartoon Network Australia and Cartoon Network in the U.S.

The series' arrival in the States is yet another triumph abroad for Marathon Animation, complementing the success of *Totally Spies* on Cartoon Network and *Martin Mystery* on Nicktoons. Between them, the shows total 15 to 20 hours of weekly viewing time on two of the highest rated children's channels in the U.S., marking an unprecedented success for a French production company. Marathon is completing the fourth season of *Totally Spies* (26x26) and Season Five will be ready in mid-2007. *Totally Spies*, which took home the TV France International 2005 prize for best-selling production, re-

counts the adventures of three typical Beverly Hills girls who are catapulted into the dangerous world of international espionage.

Xilam is also taking its viewers back to school with its new animated series *Shuriken School* (26x26), a co-production with Spain's Zinkia Entertainment in association with France 3, Jetix Europe and Nicktoons. *Shuriken School*, "a quirky playground comedy with a martial arts twist," follows 10-year old Eizan Kaburagi as he embarks on his first year at an unorthodox Ninja school where he learns how to melt into walls, disappear in a cloud of smoke and fly over rooftops.

Xilam is also bringing its beloved *Space Goofs* back for a second season. Etno, Candy, Gor-



Millimages' Pitt & Kantrop

gius and Bud return to television, just as wacky and spaced-out as ever, but now armed with new technology such as cell phones, high speed Internet and the latest in street fashion.

They even watch *Survivor* and *Jerry Springer*.

Alphanim has high hopes for *Galactik Football*, a series debuting on France 2 this year and on Jetix all over Europe and Latin America, where boys, girls and creatures from all parts of the universe compete in a soccer competition on high-tech playgrounds in space. The series employs a sophisticated motion-capture technique with a 2D rendering. According to Alphanim Chariman and CEO Christian Davin, "We will have a two-pronged approach at this market. On the one hand we'll use MIPTV as a launch pad for our latest series, on the other hand we'll test new ideas and concepts we believe in to see how the major players react to them."

Alphanim's major success thus far into 2006 has been *Robotboy*, about a battle robot who dreams of becoming a real boy, which has been commissioned for a second season. Currently being watched by more than 1 million kids in the U.K., *Robotboy* hopes to soon arrive on the American market. *Zombie Hotel*, another new title, described as an *Addams Family* à la française, has enjoyed great ratings on France 3 and BBC2. Alphanim's most popular show has been *Potatoes & Dragons*, and the series continues to earn great ratings in France and the

The arrival of *Team Galaxy* in the U.S. marks another achievement abroad for Marathon, complementing the success of *Totally Spies* (bottom right) on Cartoon Network and *Martin Mystery* on Nicktoons.



Futurikon's
Dragon Hunters



U.K.

Alphanim has recently started production on *Hairy Scary* (co-produced with France 3 and Super RTL), *Santaprentice*, (co-produced with France 5 and SuperRTL) and *Zap Jr High* (co-produced with M6 and Canal J).

Millimages is in production on the second season of *Louie* (78x7) and *Pitt & Kantrap* (13x26). In *Louie*, an interactive series, young viewers take part in the exciting adventures of artist Louis and his pal Yoko and are urged to create the drawings from the series at the same time as their on-screen heroes. Millimages Producer Antoine Vimal explains: "Millimages has a strong development slate and expects to put more series in production during 2006. As for the success of our series in the U.S., it's just as much due to the quality of the series as to the sales strength at Millimages U.K." Millimages also plans to launch a book publishing division in 2006.

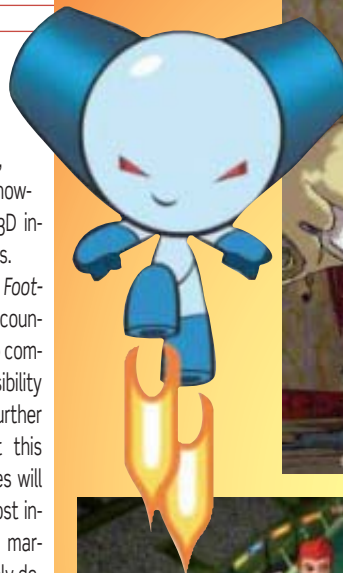
Futurikon has just completed its animated series *Dragon Hunters* (26x24) which has been pre-sold to Cartoon Network in the U.S. The series follows the wild adventures of Lian-Chu and Gwizdo, two inseparable dragon-hunting friends. Futurikon has also recently sealed a

deal with the Disney Channel U.S. and international territories for its *Miniscule* series, an animated comedy showing the private life of 3D insects in live backgrounds.

Télé Images' *Street Football* has sold to over 100 countries. With the world cup coming in June and the possibility of a second season, further sales are expected at this year's MIPTV. Télé Images will introduce one of the most innovative shows on the market, *Lili's Island*, a uniquely designed 26x13 series for TF1 and Radio Canada. According to Marie-Laure Montironi, international exec VP at Télé Images, "Thanks to the success of *Atomic Betty*, which is co-produced with Télé Images Kids, on Cartoon Network, we expect to break through the U.S. market with some of our new properties."

MoonScoop is organizing its MIPTV slate around 45 new episodes of *Code Lyoko* (52x26, 97 episodes total) in collaboration with Cartoon Network, France 3 and Canal J. The series follows the adventures of a group of students who gain exclusive knowledge of a parallel universe, a virtual world called Lyoko. This August, *Code Lyoko* toys and figurines will be available from Marvel Toys in addition to a video game based on the popular series released by the Game Factory

MoonScoop is currently developing new TV and mobile formats for hit properties like (counter-clockwise from top) *Pet Alien*, *Code Lyoko* and *Doctor Dog*.



With *Robotboy* (top left) being commissioned for another season and *Zombie Hotel* (top right) racking up impressive ratings on France 3 and BBC2, Alphanim is optimistic about the upcoming launch of *Galactik Football* (bottom) on France 2 and Jetix.



for Nintendo DS, trading cards from France Carte, a *Code Lyoko* magazine and a new album from Emi Music.

MoonScoop is also producing 52 new episodes of *Pet Alien* with Mike Young Productions, Telegael, Crest Communication and TF1 in addition to *The Fantastic Four*, a co-production with Marvel, the Cartoon Network and M6. *Doctor Dog*, based on Babette Cole's books, has already been pre-sold to TF1, ZDF, Discovery Kids in the UK, Canal J, RTBF and Scandinavia's YLE/NRK/SVT. MoonScoop is also introducing *Sam Sam*, the youngest of its superheroes, a new pre-school series in collaboration with Les Editions Bayard.

Catching the Next Wave

According to Emmanuelle Bouilhaguet, international managing director at Marathon, "Our new challenge now is to develop our business with the new platforms and media." Marathon has already signed deals for *Totally Spies* with the leading French mobile phone operators for the series' logos and ringtones, and last year they signed a worldwide deal with Gameloft for mobile games. Last December, the toon house launched a VOD service on their French website *TotallySpies.com* and *Sous-le-soleil.com* offering a few episodes of each series. Launched in

Tele Images' *Street Football* (bottom) has already sold to over 100 countries and the innovative *Lili's Island* (top) series is set for a MIPTV debut.



2005, the *Totally Spies* website is one of the most frequented French websites for kids with more than 11,500 visitors per day.

Alphanim is also experimenting with new technology: "You cannot remain a reputable producer without adapting to new media," explains Davin, "That's why we are gaining and refining our expertise in websites on top series, clips and trailers for mobile phones and for the net, promotional mini-sites and other interactive TV games."

Millimages' *Homiez* (30x1), a satire about a group of urban hoodlums, has been the most popular cartoon download among Orange and SFR (France's two principal mobile carriers) users since January 2005, and the second most popular humor download. Millimages expects the second season to have the same following.

Télé Images has also recently developed content for mobile operators, such as Co2, a flash animated series of shorts (65x2) for young adults.

MoonScoop is preparing new formats adapted to diffusion on both television and mobile phones. Many of the company's hit series are developing mobile formats and podcasting in the form of short programs and games such as *Doctor Dog*, *Titeuf*, *Code Lyoko*, *Funky Cops* and *Pet Alien*.

Futurikon is also working on a project called *Pop Secret* that aims to establish a global fashion phenomenon for youngsters. In addition to an animated series, Futurikon is in talks with telephone operators, musicians and fashion houses and plans to launch a major website based on this veritable fashion and music universe.

"As most producers will probably tell you, our main challenge is to stay at the forefront of animation without sacrificing storytelling and characterization," says Alphanim's Davin. "Our little public is more and more demanding, and I remain convinced that we have to keep offering beautifully crafted productions and riveting sto-

ries at the same time. That's how we'll manage to maintain and hopefully strengthen our success!"

So what accounts for this incredible success of French animated TV series overseas? "Creative artists, experienced producers and a strong financing domestic system can explain the success of the French animation abroad," claim Télé Images Kids' president Philippe Alessandri and Télé Images International executive VP Marie-Laure Montironi.

According to MoonScoop's president Christophe di Sabatino, "Our series aren't successful because they're French, but because their graphic style, their humor and their scripts correspond to children's expectations no matter what their nationality. We work with both French and foreign artists, and cartoons offer our TV viewers a universe with less borders or constraints than other audiovisual programs."

Futurikon's managing director Philippe Delarue argues that the success of French animation abroad is a product of both young French producers able to connect with a children's audience in addition to the industry's dynamic ability to develop quality products, innovative strategies and powerful global marketing. Delarue highlights what he refers to as "le French touch," the reason that France is internationally recognized for its mastery of graphics, visuals and scripts.

Today, France boasts several well-established production companies. TV France International's Béjot explains: "Since France suffers from a small market, from a very early stage, we've had to look for international partners." In fact, 35-40% of the average budget for a French animated series comes from international co-productions and pre-sales. "Most of our series are produced for the French market with an eye on the international market," says Béjot, "They are meant to cater to international broadcasters' needs."

Béjot also points out the importance of Franco-American co-productions, explaining that "The American market is the key market for us. The relationship is twofold; we have quite a few series airing in the U.S., and we also work with U.S. companies in Europe."

MoonScoop's di Sabatino



Mathieu Béjot



Philippe Alessandri



Christophe di Sabatino



Christian Davin



Philippe Delarue



Emmanuelle Bouilhaguet

also stressed the importance of such a trans-Atlantic relationship: "The American market remains very competitive and very pragmatic. The distributors have an excellent assessment of their audience and are very demanding even if they don't hesitate to take risks."

Many of the leading animation companies are also working on feature length films. Alphanim is looking forward to the theatrical launch of *Franklin and the Turtle Lake Treasure* at the end of 2006, and Millimages' *Piccolo & Saxo* will be released the same time. *Sacré bleu!* France has certainly arrived on the global animation scene. ■

Rebecca Leffler is a Paris-based journalist who covers the entertainment beat for *Le Film Français*.

Xilam has plans to deliver a second season of its wacky hit *Space Goofs* (right) and is getting set to introduce its new eccentric Ninja series, *Shuriken School*.



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All Aboard the Indian Express

More animation companies are benefiting from the country's surplus of CG talent and IT know-how.

by Chris Grove

If the efficiency at which Indian animation companies make their chief executives accessible to the press is any indication of their hunger to dominate the market, then workers at North American-based firms have even more reason to fear the export of their jobs.

It's not just price that's fueling the outsourcing of jobs to India, but the almost utter lack of pretension with which Indian start-ups are pursuing the market. A recent call to the Mumbai offices of Crest Animation Studios, for example, was immediately put through to CEO A. K. Madhavan for an impromptu 25-minute chat. Try that with any U.S. entertainment company and you'll be faced with layers of PR employees, phone calls, e-mails and fax requests with proposed questions that *may* lead to an interview three days later.

"The Indian economy is at a tipping point," said General Electric chairman & CEO Jeffrey Immelt in a PBS interview in mid-March. And so is the local animation business. "Four to five years ago there was nothing of significance coming out of India in terms of animation," says Madhavan. Today, a number of companies, including Crest, have made significant progress from being strictly work-for-hire to originators and producers of their own 3D programs. "Three years ago we didn't have a (3D CGI) pipeline," Madhavan continues. "By the last quarter of 2005 we had delivered 80-90 half-hours of high quality 3D stuff."

The Indian animation industry logged \$205 million in revenues in 2005, according to figures from the National Association of Software and Services Companies, a leading Indian IT trade group. NASSCOM predicts that figure

will close on \$1 billion by 2010. Industry leaders even have their eyes on the lucrative game industry. While games generated some \$10 billion in revenue in the U.S. last year (\$4 billion more than the movie business), the Indian market managed a very modest \$50 million in 2005.

"The worldwide game industry is under the same pressure as the animation business to reduce development time and reduce costs," says Kiran Karnik, NASSCOM president. Not everyone is so sanguine about growth in the Indian animation business, however. "I think we're over-dramatizing the potential," says Ronnie Screwvala, CEO of UTV Toons, during an interview on a recent trip to Los Angeles. NASSCOM's \$1 billion target can only be achieved, he says, if Indian companies get heavily into originating programming, not just outsourcing. "Even with a lot of so-called co-productions we're talking about rock-bottom prices."

With that in mind, here's a brief look at what's going on at some top Indian animation companies (and an emerging one as well):

UTV Toons

Having gone public late last year, UTV's play on the equity markets has opened up a whole realm of possibilities for expansion. For now, CEO and founder Ronnie Screwvala remains the majority shareholder (between 48% and 50% he reports). If UTV, or any animation company, is to significantly grow its business it needs access to the capital markets. "In the next 18 months we want to become as good at producing theatrical 3D animated films as any of the major

Ronnie Screwvala's toon house UTV got its start in animation inking and painting for Fox Kid's Adventures of Oliver Twist (middle) and has gone on to work on hit properties like BKN's Kong: King of Atlantis.



Ronnie Screwvala

U.S. companies," says Screwvala. UTV Toons is a wholly owned subsidiary of UTV Software Communications.

Longtime a leader in the live-action film world, Mumbai-based UTV got into the animation business in 1996, primarily as an outsource production facility for U.S.-based studios. UTV's first contract was with Haim Saban, inking and painting the Fox Kid's series *Adventures of Oliver Twist*. Now the company has a threefold strategy; as a high-volume outsourcer; a co-producer, developing and investing in new product; and as a producer of original content for the burgeoning domestic Indian market. Among other things, UTV is the 100% owner of India's only local kid's satellite channel Hungama. "There's such a wealth of IT expertise in India that we think we're only a year behind our South East Asian counterparts in 3D television and film production," Screwvala says.

DataQuest

Based in the capitol of India's exploding IT industry, Hyderabad, DQ Entertainment is also making the transition from animation service provider to animation master. At the moment, DQ's 700-plus animators in the company's brand new production facility are still largely churning out product for NBC Universal, Walt Disney and Mattel. Producers at those companies are calling all the shots literally and figuratively.

But that's all changing, says DQ CEO Tapaas Chakravarti. While not yet creating properties from scratch and owning intellectual property, DQ has an increasing number of co-productions for which it has distribution rights in India. Among these are *Choose Your Own Adventure* (co-produced with U.S.-based Mike Young Productions), *And Yet It Moves* and *Petpals* (co-produced with Italy's Rai Fiction and Gruppo Alconi). "There is a sense of jubilation with the upward movement in the TV (animation) business this past year," says Chakravarti.



CEO Tapaas Chakravarti notes DQ's progress on the animation scene, pointing to the company's increasing number of co-productions on shows like Gruppo Alconi and Rai Fiction's *And Yet it Moves* (top) and *Pet Pals* (bottom).



Tapaas Chakravarti

Especially, he adds, because 2003 and 2004 were "sluggish" years. DQ reports that it has 22 large projects currently in its pipeline, including TV, direct-to-DVD and feature films. DQ is also expanding its games output. Among others, the TV series *Skyland* is now in 3D game console production. "We anticipate hiring over 500 gaming pros in 2006," Chakravarti continues.

Crest Animation

Hard on the heels of its competitors, 2006 should be a banner year for UTV's cross-town rival. In the context of steadily rising revenues, Crest is in the beginning stages of work on its first feature-length 3D CGI film. "It puts us in the company of only seven studios worldwide that can do this sort

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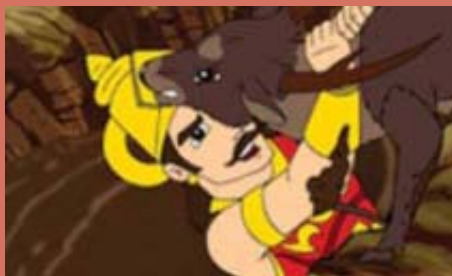
A. K. Mudhavan

A.K. Mudhavan's Crest Animation has racked up some impressive credits, producing high-end visuals for shows like Mike Young Productions' Emmy-winning *Jakers! The Adventures of Piggley Winks*.

of work," says A. K. Mudhavan, CEO of Crest. During the last quarter of 2005, work began on *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, the first of three animated films the company is co-producing with Lions Gate. The movie is based on an award-winning story from William Steig, creator of *Shrek*. "In the past two years, in terms of budget and quality, we're getting to work on some pretty impressive projects," Mudhavan says.

RVML

RVML (Rayudu Vision Media) is one of the new kids on the block. Just a year old, the privately-held Hyderabad-based company bills itself as a fully-fledged 2D/3D animation and visual effects production house capable of producing two 22-minute episodes of 2D and 30 minutes of 3D animation per month. Currently it's working on *Lava Kush* a 2D feature-length film and *Jataka Tales* a



Newcomer RVML, a full-fledged 2D/3D and vfx production house, is currently working on the *Jataka Tales* series for Sri Lankan TV.

series for Sri Lankan TV. "We're at the very beginning stages of what we want to achieve," says Praveen Kumar, RVML COO.

Started with \$2 million in seed money the company's 11,000 square-foot facility houses 45 animators. Kumar says he expects an additional \$5 million in infrastructure investment in the next two years. At present the company has no plans to get into game development. And like his colleagues who have already had great success in their move into 3D, Kumar says RVML will

be there soon enough. "2D will be alive for young kid's market for some time," he says, "so we'll keep doing that as long as the demand is there."

Color Chips

Also based in Hyderabad, Color Chips is having something of a banner couple of years as well.

The company reports that it recently completed 26 half-hour episodes of the series *Legend of the Dragon* with BKN International, USA. Currently, they're working on the series *Little Amadeus* for Penta TV, Germany. In addition, reports Color Chips chairman and managing director Sudhish Ramabhotla, the company is undertaking a major co-production with Noble House Entertainment, slated to start this July. Color Chips has also started production on a full-length film for the domestic market centered on the Indian mythological character, Lord Krishna, slated for a late 2006 release.

With its 600 employees at facilities in India and Manila, 60% of the company's product is 2D. And as with all companies contacted for this article, Ramabhotla says India continues to offer significant cost-savings. For high-end 3D projects, budgets can be up to 50% smaller than

Color Chips chairman and managing director Sudhish Ramabhotla reports that his company is on the move, having just finished up 26 half hours of *Legend of the Dragon* with BKN and is now working on *Little Amadeus* for Germany's Penta TV.



Sudhish Ramabhotla

they would be in North America. And for simpler 2D or Flash programming the savings can be up to 80%. "To create a 22-minute 2D animated show costs about \$50,000 in India," he says

The only real limit to growth at the moment, despite most animation firms having their own training programs, is a shortage of animation manpower. "We're currently training people in almost all areas in animation," Ramabhotla says. And, he adds, augmenting the company's capabilities by importing manpower from overseas. "We envisage becoming a major entertainment house in the next five years. By then, we hope to reach \$100 million in revenue." ■

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La Dolce Animazione

Italy's Cartoons on the Bay celebrates a decade of greatness

What better way to celebrate the arrival of spring than to spend a few days in the town of Positano on Italy's beautiful Amalfi coast? Of course, if those days are April 5-9, you can also experience the 10th edition of Cartoons on the Bay, a fantastic animation event focusing on some of the top shows created for the small screen worldwide.

This year, Lifetime Achievement Awards will be given to Mouse House visionary Roy Disney and Italian animation legend Bruno Bozzetto. DIC Animation Studio (congrats, Andy Heyworth!) and Italy's recently founded studio, Enarmonia, will also receive special kudos. Among the many shows competing for Pulcinella Awards are *Absolute Boy*, *Camp Lazlo*, *Lola & Virginia*, *The Buzz on Maggie* and *Z-Squad* (young category); *Beezes*, *Catscratch*, *Gino the Chicken*, *Potlach* and *The Amazing Adrenalini Brothers!* (in the overall race) and

Fireman Sam, *Get Ed*, *Monster Allergy*, *Skyland* and *Star Wars: Clone Wars—Vol. 2* (in the action/adventure category).

On the

occasion of the 10th year anniversary, we caught up with the amazing **Alfio Bastiancich**, the director of Cartoons on the Bay, to get his take on the global animation scene today:

How has the festival evolved in the past 10 years?

Alfio Bastiancich: Cartoons on the Bay was created at the time when theme channels and European animation started to develop. It has continued to follow both these phenomena over the years.

Do you see any new trends in TV animation in 2005-2006?

It is notable how there has been a shift in countries like China, India and Korea that were normally considered as resources for services and now they have the tendency to be producers. Over the years, they have gained great experience, and now they are entering the market as producers themselves or as potential co-producers that pay careful attention to the western market. And then there are countries like Israel, Iran, Russia, Ukraine, Venezuela and Zimbabwe that are slowly moving into the market.

In terms of contents, I would say that we are experiencing the interesting phenomenon of diversifying product contents and styles. For example, the Americans are producing stories and European-style graphics in Europe while the French, Italians and Germans are co-producing with Indians and Koreans for a curious mix of styles and cultures. Many of these new programs are in the Showcase and in Competition this year at Cartoons on the Bay.

Why do you think there are so many more TV projects being produced all over the world today?

Because the distribution

platforms are multiplying and the production costs are decreasing—at least for certain types of products. In Europe the digital terrestrial will radically change the way of watching television, allowing children and young adults to make their own weekly programming from a vast number of theme channels. From this point of view, animation still has great potential. Furthermore, we must not forget that the new generation of parents, and even grandparents, was born with television cartoons, and they consider them good entertainment and fun not just for their children, but also for themselves. Animation is the language of the new millennium, but it is necessary that television programming stops limiting it to just children's programming.

How is the Italian TV audience for animation different from the audiences in the U.S. and/or other countries in the EU?

There is no difference between audiences, but there is a difference in the programming. Apart from the rare exception, animation is limited to children's and youth programming. A programming slot for adult audiences or an [adult swim] does not yet exist, but in my opinion it would go over very well with young adults. Since there are many co-productions between European countries, products are exchanged. Therefore, a series originating in France or Germany may be co-produced with Italy and then also air in Italy. The same is also valid for the majority of series originating in Italy.

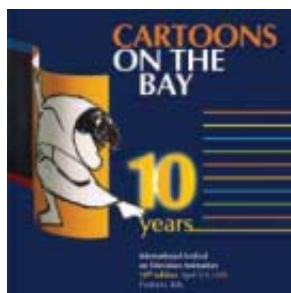
What do you think makes Cartoons on the Bay stand out in a cluttered animation calendar?

I believe that every festival has its own character. We are the first and only festival that actually looked at the animation industry by putting the majors and the independent producers from around the world into play and by awarding the Pulcinella prizes to the most innovative products, both artistically and commercially speaking. It is an original formula appreciated by the growing number of participants from several countries who can, also by means of the conferences, verify the annual state of the art in the sector: the ideal place where both the artistic and the commercial sides of the animation industry meet. ■

For more info about this great toon gathering, visit www.cartoonsbay.com.



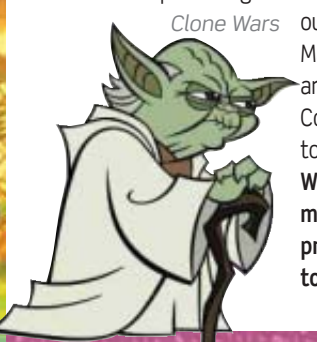
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New Toys for Girls and Boys!

Our reporter gets a sneak peek of the toys kids will be hollering about at the latest edition of Toy Fair.

by Ryan Ball

Not even two feet of snow could keep the heartiest of toy dealers and buyers away as the 2006 edition of Toy Fair commenced in a blizzard-besieged New York City in mid February. Canceled flights and other travel issues made for a less crowded show floor, but there was certainly no shortage of cool things to see and do as the curtain of secrecy was lifted on all the latest toys and licensing deals.

Animation-related items were in plentiful supply. The folks at **Pokémon USA** used the opportunity to promote the 10th anniversary of their anime phenomenon. Since the first Nintendo Game Boy title hit the market in 1996, Pokémon has been a top performer at retail, as well as on the screen, and shows no sign of stopping with *Pokémon Trozei* coming to Nintendo DS and a new animated movie making its way to the U.S. There's also a national tour of live events set to kick off on March 25 in Miami, Florida. More information on the 10th anniversary festivities can be found at

www.pokemon.com.

A new card game-based anime series gunning for a piece of Pokémon's pie is Taffy Entertainment's **Mix Master: King of Cards**. Taffy was at Toy Fair getting word out about this humorous action franchise that actually started as a massively multi-player online role-playing game with more than 2 million players in Asia. The animated series will be ready for air in spring of 2007, and a U.S. broadcaster should be announced at MIPTV in April.

One of the coolest things we saw at the show was an actual, working stop-motion

animation puppet of **Jack Skellington** from Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Master Replicas (www.masterreplicas.com) will be selling this baby for 250 bones. It comes in a coffin case and even includes a series of 12 replacement heads that can be popped on and off to change expression during animation, though we suspect most collectors will settle for admiring the Pumpkin King on a shelf.

Animators are more likely to manipulate Shocker Toys' **Shockinis**, three-inch articulated plastic figurines that people can customize and even use to make stop-motion movies. While a lot of the figures are blank slates ready for custom paint jobs, the company has recently acquired licenses to SCI-FI channel's CG-animated series *Tripping the Rift*, as well as Troma's *Toxic Avenger*, comic-book and cartoon property *Bucky O'Hare*, AC Comics and novelty metal band GWAR. Shocker (www.shocker.toys.com) also unveiled a line of seven-inch Shockinis and its own stable of original characters known as Electrobytes.

Animating Shockinis is easy using **Xipster FullStop** from Xow! (www.xow.com), a software company hawking its wares at the confab. For a while now, budding filmmakers have been animating action figures and other toys using FullStop, a frame grabber that works with any digital camera connected to a computer. Xow! also offers Xipster FreeStyle for simplified 2D animation, and just unveiled Xipclips, a web-based application that anyone can use to create custom

Jack
Skellington
Master Replica



Bratz



LICENSING



animated content for sharing on the Internet.

DVD board games were everywhere this year. **SBG/b Equal**, for one, was proud to show off its game based on DreamWorks's upcoming CG toon, **Over the Hedge**. In addition to its various licensed DreamWorks Animation properties, the company is set to release family DVD games based on the hit CBS crime series *CSI* and sports brands NASCAR and WWE Wrestling.

What Toy Fair would be complete without an appearance by the Bratz, those ubiquitous fashion-conscious girls who have taken the fashion doll scene and animation world by storm? One of the latest offerings from MGA Entertainment is **Bratz Mp3 Pets**, dolls that connect to your Mp3 player and dance to the tempo. For boys, the company is rolling out a line of cool die-cast cars and remote-controlled vehicles based on Marvel superhero brands, including the upcoming feature films *Spider-Man 3* and *Ghost Rider*.

If Toy Fair '06 is any indication, high-tech toys will be bigger than ever this holiday season as kids everywhere clamor for life-like baby dolls that grow before your eyes and accessories for their iPods, cell phones and digital cameras. Still, it's nice to see that the simple classics are still around. When the batteries run down, you can always count on a good yo-yo, Pogo Stick or potato gun. ■

Taffy Entertainments
Mix Master: King of Cards



www.animationmagazine.net

ANIMATION MAGAZINE

May 2006 53

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Susumu Yukuhira, Digital Matte Supervisor at ILM



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A Few of Their Favorite Things

Exclusive! Digital pros reveal their secret obsessions and fave gadgets!

Every year, in time for the National Assoc. of Broadcasters confab in Vegas, *Animation Magazine* checks in with a handful of vfx and digital animation pros to find out which tech tools they like to use when they're working ... and which movies and shows they enjoy when they're not! Our reporter **Ellen Wolff** checks in with pros from ILM, DreamWorks, Rhythm & Hues, Sony Imageworks, Digital Domain and Blur Studios, and she reports on their picks.

Steve Nichols, CG Animator, ILM

Credits: *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* and *Star Wars' Episodes 1, 2 and 3*.

Current Project: *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*.

Favorite Web Destination: Anything to do with B-movie monsters.

Favorite Animation Software: Alias Maya.

Favorite Animated Character: It's a tough choice between Skeleton #3 from *Jason and the Argonauts* and Vermithrax Pejorative from *Dragonslayer*.

Most Anticipated Movie of 2006: *Pirates of The Caribbean 2*!! Of course!

Never Miss: *Family Guy*, *Battlestar Galactica*—I'm a big nerd!

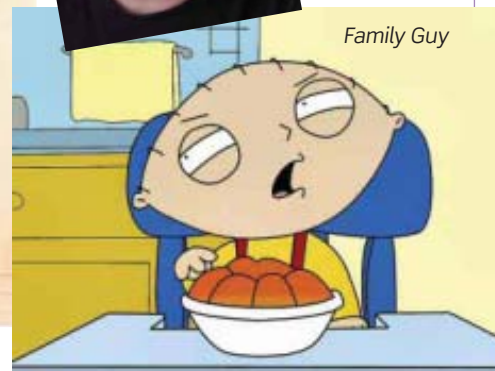
Toons I would watch on an iPod: *Wallace and Gromit: The Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, *Looney Tunes*, *My Neighbor Totoro*, *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad* (if I had room).

Annoying Trend of the Moment: Outsourced CG features.

Advice on Landing a Job: "Don't sacrifice quality for flashy presentation on your reel. Spend the time on a strong animation performance instead of trying to jazz it up with crazy camera moves, music and lighting."



Battlestar Galactica



Family Guy

Amanda Dague Animation Technical Director, Rhythm & Hues

Credits: *Dr. Doolittle 2*, *Scooby-Doo 1 and 2*.

Current Project: *Garfield 2*

Favorite Web Destination: www.castersblog.com (it's like Bridget Jones's Diary for geeks!)

Favorite Animation Software: It's all the same to me. Give me a strong curve editor and I'm happy!

Favorite Animated Character: I'm crackers for Gromit.

Most Anticipated Movie of 2006: *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*. That's going to be a fun one!

Never Miss: *Battlestar Galactica*. I'm also a PBS junkie.

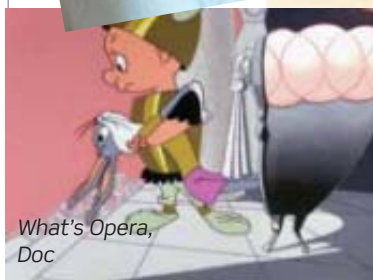
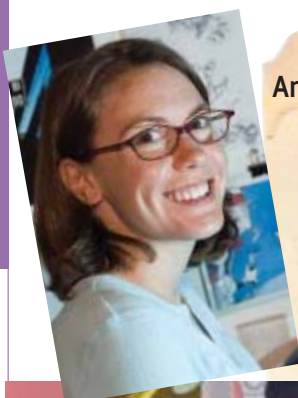
Toons I would watch on an iPod: *The Rabbit of Seville* and *What's Opera, Doc?*

Annoying Trend of the Moment: "Performance" Capture.

Advice on Landing a Job: "There seems to be a ton of work out there this year. So many animated and effects-intensive movies are in the works. It's an artist's market, so enjoy it!"



Gromit



What's Opera, Doc

Mahesh Ramasubramanian, Vfx Lead, DreamWorks Animation

Credits: *Madagascar*, the two *Shrek* movies and *Shrek 4-D*.

Current Project: Head of effects for *Over the Hedge*.

Favorite Web Destination: www.cricinfo.com (a sports site for cricket fans).

Favorite Animation Software: Alias Maya.

Favorite Animated Character: Donkey from *Shrek*.

Most Anticipated Movie of 2006: *Over the Hedge*!

Never Miss: *Everwood*, *The Apprentice*.

Toons I would watch on an iPod: *The Simpsons*.

Annoying Trend of the Moment: In animated features, the bar of minimum visual standards is being lowered.

Advice on Landing a Job: "Network with school or studio alumni."



South Park



Sze Jones, Character Modeling Supervisor, Blur Studio

Credits: *Warhammer Fantasy*, *Aeon Flux* and *Everquest II* games; *Mickey's Twice Upon a Christmas*.

Current Project: Modeling a female warrior and a female sorcerer for game cinematics in *Hellgate: London*.

Favorite Web Destination: CG Talk.

Favorite Animation Software: Z-Brush and 3ds Max.

Favorite Animated Character: Jack Skellington from *The Nightmare Before Christmas*.

Most Anticipated Movie of 2006: *Ice Age2: The Meltdown*.

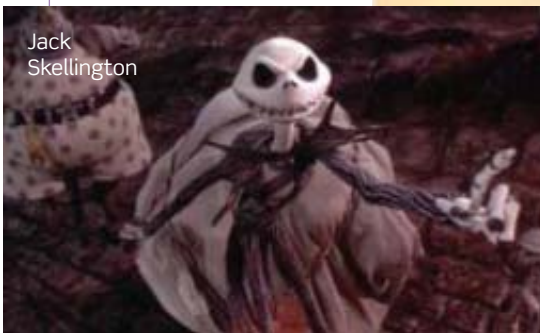
Never Miss: *MythBusters*

Toons I would watch on an iPod: *South Park*.

Annoying Trend of the Moment: Excessive CG that is irrelevant to the storytelling in movies.

Advice on Landing a Job: "Most CG houses now value artists with multiple skill sets. Specialize in one or a few areas and have a general knowledge of production workflow. Pursue what you love."

Jack
Skellington



Pete Travers,

Vfx Supervisor, Sony Pictures Imageworks
Visual Effects Supervisor

Credits: *The Aviator*, IMAX version of *The Matrix: Reloaded*. Pete also supervised CG for *Stuart Little 2* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*.

Current Project: *Click*, comic fantasy movie with Adam Sandler.

Favorite Web Destination: www.patriots.com, official site fo the NFL's New England Patriots.

Favorite Animation Software: Alias Maya.

Favorite Animated Character: Bender from *Futurama*.

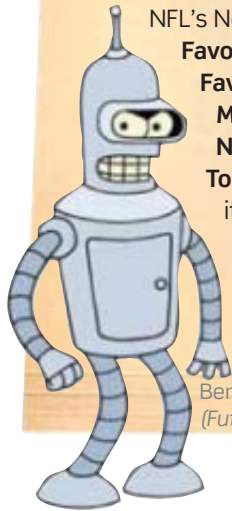
Most Anticipated Movie of 2006: *The Da Vinci Code*.

Never Miss: *The Colbert Report*.

Toons I would watch on an iPod: The old *Jonny Quest* show, if it were available.

Annoying CG Trend of the Moment: Overuse of the term "cutting edge".

Advice on Landing a Job: "Eliminate belligerence and alcohol during your interview!"



Bender
(*Futurama*)



Jonny Quest

Brad Herman,

Lead Technical Director, Digital Domain

Credits: Brad has found time to work on *The Italian Job*, *Stealth* and *The Missing*—when he wasn't racing his Red 2003 MINI Cooper S around Southern California racetracks.

Current Project: *Flags of Our Fathers*, year-end war drama directed by Clint Eastwood.

Favorite Web Destination: <http://dbmini.us/> (for MINI Cooper aficionados, of course).

Favorite Animation Software: Massive.

Favorite Animated Character: Syndrome from *The Incredibles*.

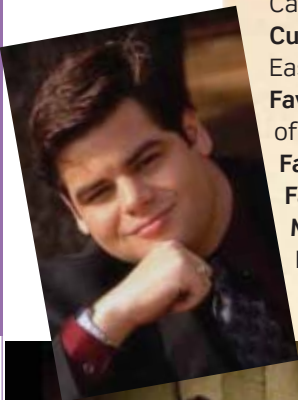
Most Anticipated Movie of 2006: *Superman Returns*.

Never Miss: *Stargate SG-1*.

Toons I would watch on an iPod: The PSP has a much better screen, so I would use that. As for shows: *Cowboy Bebop*, *Big-O*, and any Paul Dini episode of *Batman/Superman*.

Annoying Trend of the Moment: Asset Management Systems.

Advice on Landing a Job: "In my professional opinion it has become much harder over the last 24 months to break into the industry. It's just not as easy as it once was to get your foot in the door that first time. You have to have skill, drive and a lot of will. But if you have experience, you should have no problems at all. In fact, we're hiring, so send in your reels!"



Stargate SG-1



Syndrome
(*The Incredibles*)

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www.daz3d.com



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Vegas Goes Electronic

A peek at what's new and newsworthy at this month's NAB show in Vegas.

If all the latest developments in Podcasting, mobile development, IPTV and HD have left you dazed and confused, you may want to book a flight to Vegas for this year's NAB (National Assoc. of Broadcasters) conference April 22-27. Billed as the world's largest Electronic Media Show, this exciting and at times, overwhelming show will let you

pick up everything you need to make your digital education complete. Don't forget to get there early for Titanic director James Cameron's special keynote speech on digital cinema on Sunday, April 23, at 9:05 a.m. (For more info, visit www.nabshow.com). Here are some of the cool tech and vfx highlights to look for at the big show.

A for Adobe

Fresh off releasing the public beta of the XMP (Extensible Metadata Platform) Toolkit Version 4.0, **Adobe** will have a huge presence at the event.

Jim Guerard, Adobe's VP of product management for web and video solutions will share the company's post-Macromedia acquisition vision for reshaping the future

of the video and the Web at two NAB sessions.

On Tuesday, April 25, from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m., Guerard will discuss the business-related benefits of new digital media applications at a session titled "Earthquake Insurance: Are You Ready for the Tectonic Shifts in Film and Broadcast?" Then, on Wednesday, April 26, from 9 to 10 a.m., he will deliver a keynote focusing on "Casting a Wider Net: Capturing Viewers with Rich Media Experiences for Broadcast, Web and Mobile."

The company will also demo its brand spanking new Adobe Production Studio (launched in January) in Booth #SL3732, along with the newly acquired Macromedia products in Studio 8 (includes Dreamweaver 8, Flash 8, Flash Professional 8, Fireworks 8, Contribute 3 and FlashPaper). The Adobe Production Studio includes Adobe Af-

ter Effects 7.0, Adobe Premiere Pro 2.0, Adobe Audition 2.0, Adobe Encore 2.0, Photoshop CS2 and Illustrator CS2. For more info., visit www.adobe.com/motion.

Autodesk's Show and Tell

Is it just us or does the Montreal-based solutions company Autodesk seem to be quite visible and ubiquitous these days? Nevertheless, NAB marks one of the first times that

Maya and MotionBuilder will be featured as part of the **Autodesk Media & Entertainment** product portfolio. (The company closed the acquisition of Alias on Jan. 10.)

NAB attendees can also check out the new Autodesk Incinerator 1.0 (at the company's booth # SL3719). The solution uses computing cluster technology to provide real-time Lustre capabilities for complex primary and secondary color correction, as well as real-time vfx processing at High-Def and 2K resolutions and accelerated 4K processing. Of course, you can always set some time aside to reconnect with 3ds Max 8, Lustre, Discreet Flame, Discreet Smoke and Autodesk Toxik. Throughout the show, Autodesk will present on its digital media pipeline, 3D portfolio, digital daily workflow for film, and data-centric workflow for TV production. There's also a User Group Event scheduled for Sunday, April 23,

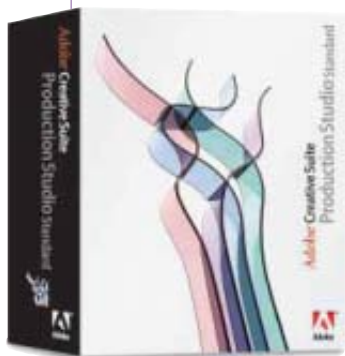
from 4 to 7 p.m. and an After Hours session (Tuesday, April 25 from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.) on how to organize your digital pipeline to create a flexible, scalable workflow and increase efficiency. For more info, visit usa.autodesk.com.

Out of the BOXX

If you work in the vfx industry, you know how much a high-performance workstation can improve the day-to-day quality of your work. That's why we're certain tech-heads are going to flock to BOXX Technologies' booth (#SL534) at NAB to get a peek at the

new **APEXX 8** workstation. Designed specifically to maximize productivity of vfx professionals, this baby is a powerful new super-workstation capable of handling 2k and 4k film. Not only does it combine the ability to work in real-time on very large files (up to 128GB of memory) with the performance of 16 processing cores in a versatile system, it's quiet enough to let you hear your own thoughts.

The APEXX 8 will be performing high-end video encoding to demonstrate its exceptional processing power. ProMax, will also demon-



strate top-of-the-line, custom-configured video-editing solutions based on 3DBOXX technology and integrated by ProMax. For more information on Austin, Texas-based BOXX Technologies, visit www.boxxtech.com.

Caring for the Masses

Fans of vfx-heavy blockbusters such as *King Kong*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy already know about the amazing virtual crowds that **Massive Software** can produce for a movie. At NAB 2006, Massive will unveil how visual effects and post-production companies in television and commercials can leverage the artificial intelligence-driven 3D



crowd. The company will demonstrate its flagship product Massive Prime for projects that require realistic crowd action with a high level of customization of characters and their movements. Massive will also showcase Massive Jet, which introduces out-of-the-box virtual crowd capabilities using Massive's pre-built Ready-to-Run Agents. Facilities can use this product to easily automate production of the most common crowd scenes (fans in a stadium or people milling on streets). For more info, visit www.massivesoftware.com.

Digital-Tutors Delivers New Guides for ZBrush, XSI

So you're curious about the latest ZBrush and XSI workflow, but are a bit hesitant to dive in pick up all the 3D applications and capabilities? Well, you're in luck because **Digital-Tutors** has released a new six-hour training

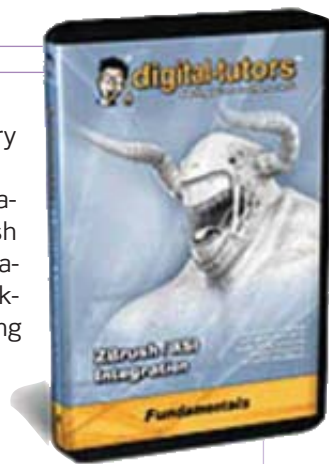
kit on the very subject.

"The integration of ZBrush and 3D applications is remarkable and learning how to use its powerful capabilities in a creative workflow can be daunting for some," says Sunder Iyer, senior 3D curriculum developer. "Through using this training kit, artists will learn how to model a concept creature using advanced modeling, sculpting and detailing techniques, from start to finish."

ZBrush and XSI Integration guides users through the entire process of modeling, sculpting, UV layout and rendering using the complimentary workflow between ZBrush and XSI workflow. Each lesson is developed to increase productivity with time-saving tips and fun, hands-on projects. Topics include: an application overview, polygon modeling, projection master, morph targets, UV mapping techniques, geometry sculpting, displacement maps, cavity maps, normal maps, brushes, symmetry techniques, stencils, advanced geometry tools, rendering with mental ray and sub-pixel displacement. For a full outline and pricing information, visit www.digitaltutors.com/store/product.php?productid=1128

Nuking NAB

The folks at D2 would like to remind you that NAB '06 will be the first public showcase of **Nuke v4.5**, the new version of the Academy Award-winning compositing and effects system from D2 Software, a subsidiary of Digital Domain. Visitors to



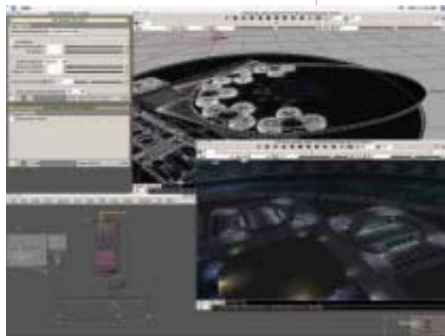
the Nuke pod (Avid Developer Community booth# SL1513, pod DD) will see Nuke v4.5, featuring an advanced 3D compositing workspace, 32-bit floating point rendering, Open EXR support including 64 channels of image data, as well as a new image-based keyer and UI mode introduced with v4.5. Nuke is "designed by artists for artists" and is used by Digital Domain, Weta Digital, ReelFX, DNA Productions, Sway Studio and other top VFX companies. Nuke v4.5 is available for Linux, Irix, Windows and Mac OSX platforms.

Robert Nederhorst, vfx Supervisor at Sway Studio, beta tested the v4.5 release. "They've created some fantastic new features for the 4.5 release. If the workflow and technical updates weren't enough, they decided to put in completely new keying technology that really makes some serious waves at seriously difficult keying. This release re-affirms our reason for choosing Nuke originally—it truly is built by artists, for artists." Now with that kind of a recommendation, who can resist checking it out at the show! More info and pricing information can be found at www.d2software.com

Sony Media Software Makes Some Sound

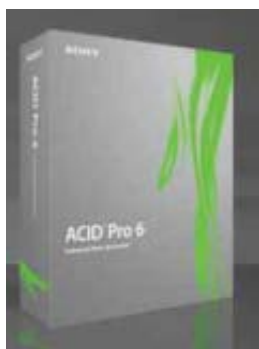
Sony Media Software will also have a strong presence on the convention floor as it offers expanded support for cameras, decks, IPTV devices and portable media players. A technology preview of XDCAM HD functionality in the Sony Vegas NLE; Cinescore, a new software-based soundtrack creation platform, and the upgraded ACID Pro, a new approach to multitrack recording, MIDI sequencing and loop-based music creation is also on the menu this year.

Sony Media Software technical specialists will be providing one-on-one training for current UMD Com-



poser customers as well as providing free consultations to production companies that are interested in producing and authoring content for the UMD Video format for PSP.

You can also look for an update to the UMC Composer (the only authoring suite of its kind for the UMD movie format) and a new Master Box Set of Sony Pictures Sound Effects (volumes 1-10). For the first time, Sony Media Software will also launch the first-ever official Vegas Software Certification Classes as part of the NAB Post/Production conference produced by Future Media Concepts. For more information, please visit: www.sony.com/mediaoftware



Viz|3G Delivers Real-Time Cell Graphics

Vizrt will unveil its new Viz|3G graphics motor for mobile telephones and other mobile devices at NAB. Viz|3G, based on Vizrt's Viz|Engine renderer and Adactus' MPEG-21 standards-based multimedia delivery platform, marks the first integration of a graphics engine for mobile phone video viewing applications. Using the Viz|3G platform, graphics are sent as meta data (description of data) in a separate stream from the video, producing

a much higher quality visual experience than compressing the graphics as part of the video stream. Currently, cell-phone screens are too small and the video is too compressed for the graphics embedded within the video to be legible. With graphics as a separate stream and its enhanced readability, this creates ample opportunity for the customization and localization and personalization of targeted advertising placements. Viz|3G will be available as part of a package installed on phones, or it may be downloaded and installed. It will be available worldwide, but with a select set of customers initially. You can visit them at Booth #SL1323 at NAB or on the web at www.vizrt.com



VISUAL EFFECTS

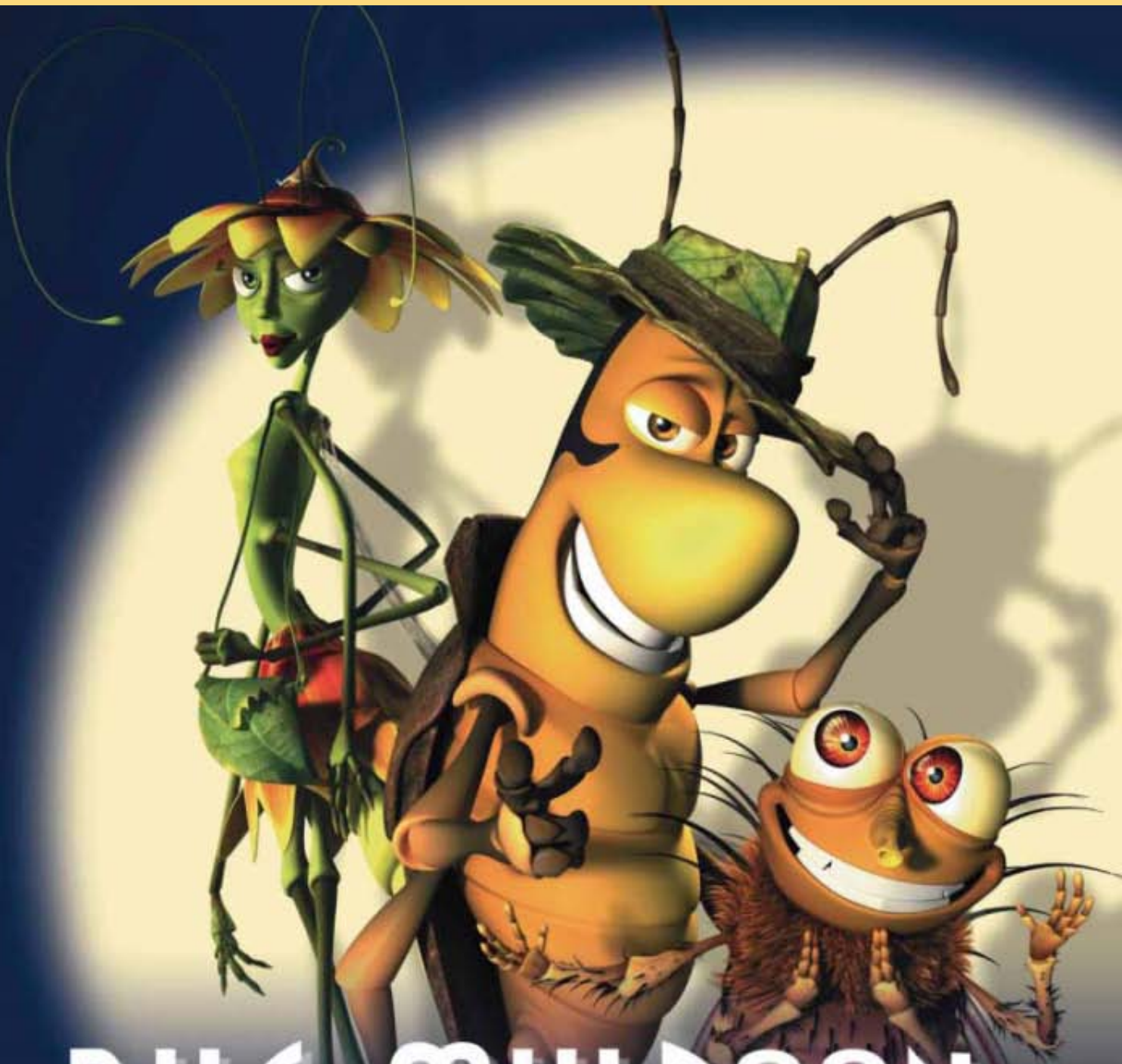


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Cause & Effect

Framestore rewinds evolution for a clever TV Guinness spot.

by Barbara Robertson

Like the title, the live-action characters in the Guinness commercial “noitulovE” run backwards, but it took some forward thinking on the part of the crew at Framestore CFC to create the complex, fast-moving 60-second spot in three and a half months.

The clever spot starts with three guys drinking beer in a pub. As the camera pulls back, they begin walking backwards, out of the pub and down a city street. Quick cut to a helicopter shot of the city at night. As day breaks, the buildings begin shrinking and the city devolves into a rural landscape. We next see the men from behind; they’re standing in a meadow with one scraggly tree in front of them. They walk backwards. Trees pop up around them. The camera swings around to the side and then faces them, and as the camera moves, the men’s hair grows and their clothes morph into rough peasant clothes. The de-evolution continues through the spot—the men eventually become Neanderthals and then monkeys. The monkeys turn into flying squirrels that run into a river and become dolphins that swim backwards and jump out of an ocean and turn into

birds as they land on the shore. The birds devolve into dinosaurs and then into primordial mudskippers, which look like bug-eyed fish. Drinking mud clearly does not make the prehistoric creatures happy, but they’ll have to wait 35 million years, for the whole of evolution to take place to get a good drink. The tag line? Good things come to those who wait.

“Every shot was completely different,” says Andy Boyd, who led the 3D team at Framestore CFC where the spot was created. “Normally we can

develop tools and techniques at the beginning that carry through the whole thing, but with this, every shot was completely different. Each shot was like a mini-commercial in its own right with its own problems to be solved and some were only 20 frames long.”

Because the time schedule gave the post-production crew about 12 weeks from shoot to delivery, the first thing the team did was decide which elements would be 3D, which would be 2D

and which would be practical. The actors were shot on green-screen stages with makeup and clothes changing as they turned from modern men to Neanderthals thanks to slick painting and compositing on Autodesk Discreet’s Inferno.

Only a few shots started with a live-action plate for backgrounds, though. Instead, vfx supervisor Will Bartlett crafted many of the constantly changing landscapes from time-lapse stills shot with a digital camera in Iceland.

“Will would take stills from the shoot, stitch them together, warp them and create camera moves all on the Inferno,” says Boyd. “It made the process really tricky. I’d say to Will, ‘Give me the back plate,’ and he’d say, ‘No, you give me the 3D and I’ll make the back plate.’”

Five of the sequences were completely 3D. By creating procedures in Side Effects Software’s Houdini, Boyd’s

continued on page 64



Red Caps

EPS 26X26'



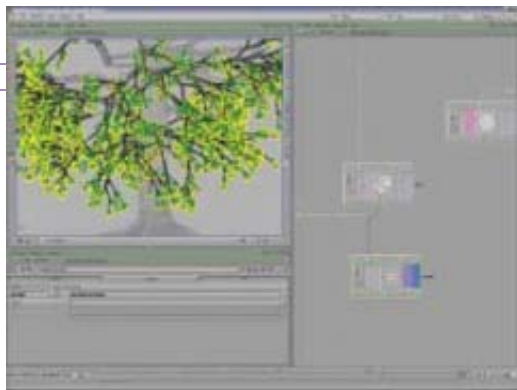
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Stitches in Time:

Led by Andy Boyd, the team at Framestore created procedures in Side Effects' Houdini to grow 3D plants and trees, build a city, erode rocks and animate prehistoric beasts.



Cause & Effect

continued from page 62

team grew 3D plants and trees, built a city, eroded rocks and animated numerous CG animals.

To grow grass quickly and efficiently, the 3D artists used RenderMan's RIB boxes. In Houdini, they created one highly detailed clump of animated grass growing with variations, but the geometry isn't in the scene; RenderMan references it at render time. "The scene has only the placement and the reference to where the geometry is," Boyd says. "The geometry is stored separately, so it's very efficient."

For trees, Boyd again worked in Houdini to create evolving geometry procedurally using the branching capability of L-systems and Houdini's copy duplicating feature. The crew started with one generic tree and then pasted branches and leaves procedurally or by hand to create variations.

"We only had 40 frames, so we decided to keep the same set of leaves for the trees' lives," Boyd says. "It's an artistic interpretation of how they might grow and die." For distant trees and high angle shots, the artists rendered the trees with RIB boxes; foreground trees were rendered in the scene.

To populate the landscape with the CG trees and other plants, and to create the disappearing city, the crew used Houdini's copy SOP for duplications and instancing, controlling the copy-stamping feature with attributes painted into the landscape. "We had 12 Edwardian and Victorian houses, for example, which we modified at copy time," says Boyd. The city buildings were "birthed" with particles.

At one point during the spot, a canyon with a waterfall erodes into a river flowing through mud flats. To crumble the canyon, Boyd wrote feedback loops in Houdini using the software's VEX scripting language so that he could simultaneously change the shape and look of the landscape procedurally.

In addition to landscape elements, all the animals except the chimps and the mudskippers are 3D, and all except the dinosaur were modeled from scratch. The dinosaur was borrowed from the TV special *Walking with Monsters*. The chimps, taken from stock footage, walk on CG trees—before integrating the stock footage into the CG environment, the team stabilized the shot and added a new camera move. As for the mudskippers—the crew used the live-action footage for texture maps.

Not all the elements in the Guinness spot were created with 3D computer graphics or digital stills, though: Bartlett devised clever home-brew techniques to help save time. They filmed Bartlett shooting a flame thrower at live plants and used the dying foliage in some shots. "We switched to 3D, though," Boyd says, so we wouldn't have to kill any more plants."

But, rather than using computer graphics to create distorting rock formations in one landscape, Bartlett stirred up a batch of cookie dough with various grains, Grape Nuts and Special K cereals, and then shot time-lapse photographs every 10 seconds of the dough rising or falling as it baked.

"It was such a huge project that we had to cut corners," Boyd says.

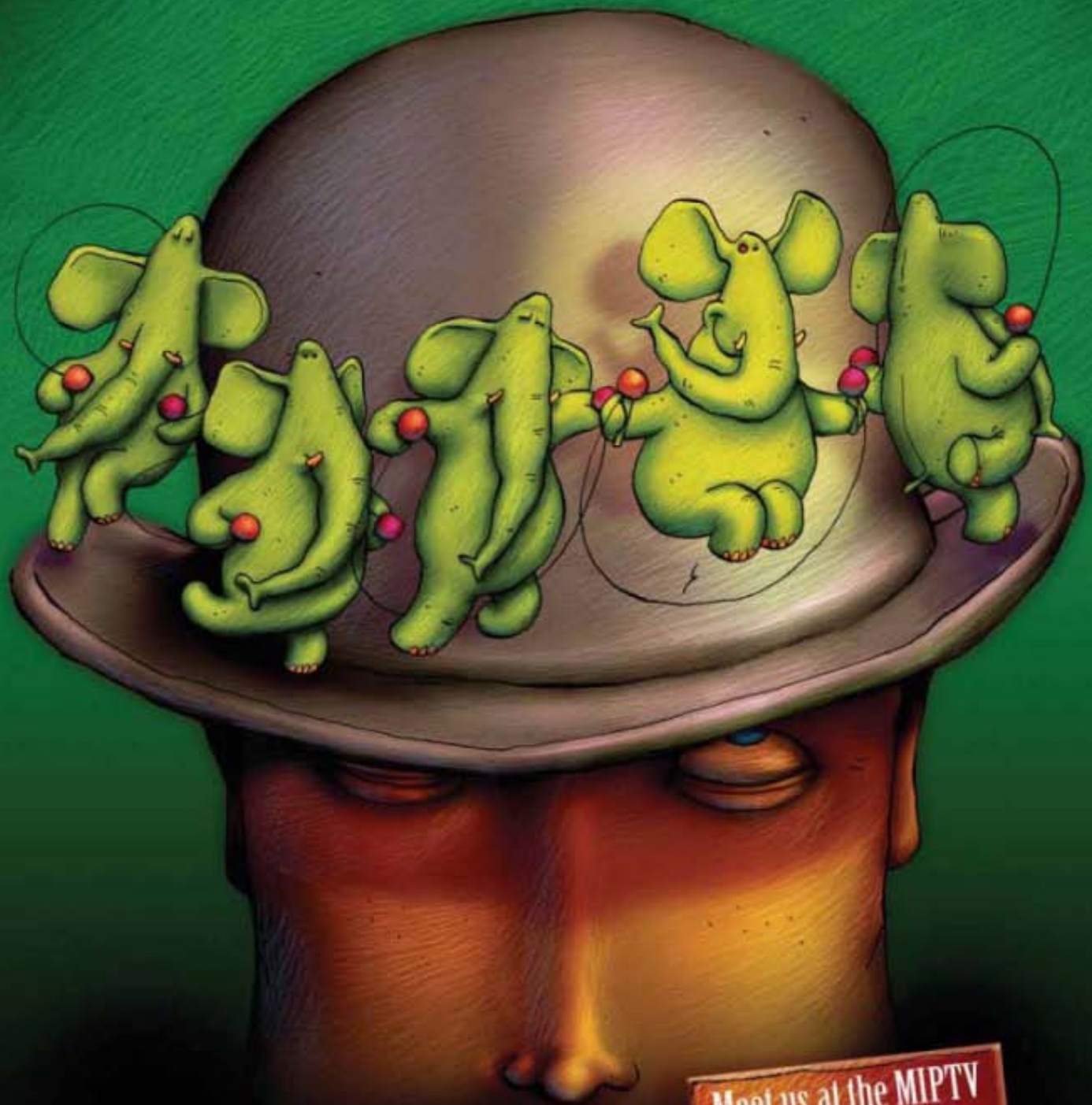
So was it their biggest? "It's funny," he says. "I would have said that until I got the next job. That one has 302 3D animals in it."

Amazing what can happen in 60 seconds. ■

Barbara Robertson is an award-winning journalist who specializes in visual effects and computer animation. If you have any cool tips for her, you can e-mail her at brobertson@animationmagazine.net.



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Tech Reviews

Eovia's Carrara 5

Sometimes big things come in little boxes. Such is the case with Carrara 5 from Eovia. I have to admit, the product never really crossed my path—and I've been around. So, when I started to look through it for review, I was very surprised by how advanced the toolset is in this **extremely** low-priced package.

Carrara is the offspring of Ray Dream Designer and Infini-D, making it part of a family tree that is just as old as Maya, 3ds Max, Softimage and Lightwave. It has a substantial user base, but somehow it was never able to get a toehold into the animation and visual effects industries.

As far as low-cost 3D packages go, this one packs a wallop. You have sub-D modeling, full-character rigging and animation, subsurface scattering, ambient occlusion, particle systems and a substantial terrain generator. The interface is chock full of libraries and icons, allowing you to drag and drop pre-made scenes, objects, lighting setups, etc into the Assembly Room. This is a great way

to quickly assemble a scene, especially for animatic or previz purposes. Once you get beyond that assembly stage, the lighting and rendering tools are formidable enough to be dangerous. Using Ray Dream as the raytracing backbone, Carrara allows for some really nice imagery.

I felt a bit lost within Carrara, but I would blame my lack of experience more than that specific design. I am sure that the diehards would run circles around me. Regardless, I am not really a huge fan of compartmentalizing the processes—which is why I've stayed away from Lightwave. Carrara's approach to having different “rooms” where different stages happen (assembly, modeling, lighting, rendering) may feel inefficient to some.

Another serious drawback, which might be the cause of the oversight in the industry, is the lack of real-world tools. For instance, I could not find any



by Todd
Sheridan
Perry



controls in the camera that correlate to the size of the filmplane or filmback. An 18mm lens on a 16mm camera is very different than one on a 35mm camera or an HD camera or a DV camera. This is because the size of the recorded image is different for all the cameras. The filmback is as integral

and irremovable as the lens. Similarly, I could not find controls to adjust the decay of a light source outside of a falloff range slider—and this apparently gives you the ability to cut off the light at a certain distance (which is still useful). However, without being able to set your light to falloff at least linearly (squared would be more accurate), half of a lighting TDs control is removed. Without these straightforward controls, there is no possible way to do any serious production work that deal with live-action footage.

Overall, however, Carrara is a substantial 3D program. It is absolutely astonishing how much they have crammed into this little package. How they keep the price down around \$300 is remarkable. It makes me question the cost of other programs which are 10 to 30 times greater. You can accomplish almost anything that the big boys do with some sweat equity and ingenuity—and it certainly would be a good foundation for hobbyists to sharpen their 3D skills without a huge investment.

Website: www.eovia.com

Price: \$199 (companion license); \$399 (Carrara Pro); \$349 (Plus Hexagon 1); \$399 (plus Poser 6) ■

Todd Sheridan Perry is the co-owner and visual effects supervisor for Max Ink Cafe and Max Ink Productions. He is currently editing their first documentary *The Month of October*.



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Pulcinella Awards

STUDIO VITALE

Digital Magic

Musings on Coke's Drop-Dead Gorgeous Ads and Softimage's New Tool



by Chris Grove

While Bode Miller was tanking miserably at this winter's Olympics, visually, the 16-day event was often a feast for the eyes. Especially for those lucky enough to have a high-definition television set.

The HD pictures from Torino Espozizioni (hockey), Sauze d'Oulx (free-style skiing), Bardonecchia (half-pipe) and other locales were often so rad it made one forget the general uneventful nature of the games. And, despite the likes of Nike's unintentionally-made-parody-by-his-performance "Join Bode" ads, with their clichéd faux-documentary look, some savvy advertisers stopped trying to "break through the clutter" and delivered some boffo spots in spite of themselves. Just when it seemed soul-patched creatives from coast-to-coast had forgotten the basics of advertising (actually making you feel *good* about choosing their client's product over someone else's), the Coca Cola Company unveiled a whimsical lifestyle campaign that hearkened back to its "Real Thing"

days.

Using the collective talent of Digital Domain, commercial director Lance Acord (Park Pictures) and Chicago's Leo Burnett, the two *Drops* ads screened for this column are a cool visual and aural treat—rarity in the frat-culture aesthetic that governs the bulk of TV advertising these days. Best known for its photo-real work, DD boffins devised a mix of colorful motion graphics, animation and live-action footage. "(All of us) were looking for a different kind of project as was Lance," says Ed Ulbrich, DD's senior VP and general manager. "Clients often come to us for the photo-real visuals we're known for. But Leo Burnett had some different ideas and



we were anxious to show what we can do in this space."

The 60-second version of *Drops* opens on a man bicycling on a country road. Rather than kicking up a cloud of dust, a plume of pastel-colored droplets trails behind. Moving seamlessly from a live-action shot to '60's-inspired' animation, one drop lands in a grassy field, triggering a fast-growing dandelion. A woman's hand reaches down to pick the flower and she raises it to her lips. We enter live action again while the flower remains animated. The woman blows on the dandelion and releases the colorful drops on another journey. The drops travel from one scene to another—a frozen lake with ice skaters, a rehearsal room where a young rock band is finding its groove, a gymnasium where a young athlete turns and flips in the air, underwater where children swim and a field where a romantic couple watch the sun go down. No hideous dancing monkeys or undergrads stuffing their face with a giant burger anywhere in sight.

Event television brings out the best and worst that ad agencies can offer. In this case, Coke execs have backed



VISUAL EFFECTS

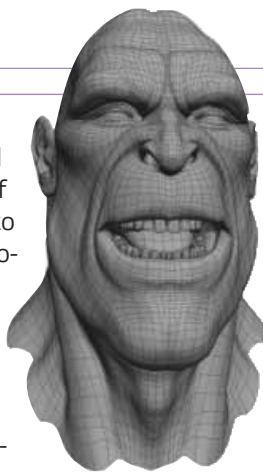
an ad campaign that partially answers the ad industry's worst fear—viewers filtering out their ads because they're either boring or offensive or both. Give them something cool, creative and unique to look at that evokes some sort of positive feelings and they may keep watching.

Meanwhile, Montreal-based Softimage continues its leap toward the holy grail of every actor-hating producer—perfected, computer generated thespians. Unveiled at SIGGRAPH 2005, the software with the mildly disquieting name, Face Robot, will be available to the masses sometime this year.

Its capabilities are currently on display in U2's music video of *Original of the Species*. Gotham-based design and effects company Spontaneous used Softimage character animation technology to create the video. Among other things, *Species* features a digital version of Bono accompanied by a computer-generated woman. Both characters were created using

XSI v5.0 and animated with an alpha version of Face Robot. According to a company release, Robot allows 3D artists to "achieve realistic, life-like facial animation for high-end film and games."

The U2 video was conceived and directed by long-time band collaborator, Catherine Owens. "One of the concepts of the video was for Bono to enter and exist in the woman's private, digital world for a brief moment in time. When we saw an early model of her character, the images were absolutely haunting. We knew that we could achieve exactly what we had imagined," she says. To create the video's unique look, Spontaneous brought a digital scan of Bono into XSI animation software to prepare a 3D model for animation. Using Robot, data recorded from a live motion-capture session was applied to animate



Bono's digital double.

For the female character, meanwhile, Spontaneous re-used the motion capture data from Bono to animate her.

The ability to repurpose this data—a process known as re-targeting—allowed for significant cost-saving. "This was a high-profile project with an extremely tight deadline, and by having access to Face Robot, we were able to deliver," says Lawrence Nimrichter, Spontaneous director of animation. Softimage says Robot's technology is built on a new computer model of facial soft tissue that mimics the full range of emotions portrayed by the human face, giving artists more control over details, including wrinkles, frowns, flaring nostrils and bulging neck muscles. So if they ever make *Terminator 4*, Arnold can stay in Sacramento. ■

If you have a hot tip for Chris, you can reach him at cwjg@earthlink.net.

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How to Pass the Character Design Test and Draw for Animated TV

by Brad Manzo

Several years ago, character designers seeking work on animated TV shows interviewed and showed their portfolios, then waited to see if they landed the job. However, about five years ago, studios in Hollywood began handing out take-home “tests” to all applicants, regardless of experience.

“Part of the reason for the test was because the market became flooded with artists. And some of the work they did for shows didn’t match what was in the artist’s portfolio,” says Darrel Bowen, a character designer for shows such as the original *Rugrats* pilot and the *What’s New Scooby Doo?* series.

In addition, as the character designer test varies from studio to studio, it can be difficult to both prepare for and take. “A lot of these studios want the test done in a couple of days. One studio wanted five different characters, turnaround and cleanup, in two days. It turned out to be about 30 drawings,” Bowen says.

However, if you’re breaking into character design, taking a test puts you on a level playing field with experienced character designers. As former *Fairly OddParents*’ character designer Mike Allen says, “To get the job on *Fairly OddParents*, I beat out a more experienced Disney designer. I put everything into that test.”

Here’s how to pass the test, from the designers themselves:

Find mentors and coaches to help you learn the finer points of character design.

“You have to take classes or work with a mentor. Since my background is illustration, I didn’t have enough knowl-

edge in animation. I learned about things such as turnarounds at the Animation Academy,” says Allen.

There are certain things, though, they don’t teach in school. “Production schedules occur fast. I never learned that in school. You have to be creative and fast on the job and when taking the test,” Bowen says.

Another thing they can’t teach you at school is when your portfolio is ready to submit. Allen sought out a career coach, Pam Thompson, “who told me I was ready and that Nickelodeon was looking.”

Thomas Perkins, a character designer on the new Cartoon Network show, *Ben 10*, says, “I worked at Sony Animation when they were a fledgling company (1997) willing to school people. I had a mentor who provided me a lot of

character training, but since production cycles are so fast, I wouldn’t assume you’ll get on the job training.”

Submit a portfolio worthy of taking the test.

Your portfolio has to show good drawing skills and “should include characters you’ve created for different studios (tests or on the job) and your own characters, as well as turnarounds and poses for each character. You should show all the different job aspects of a character designer,” Bowen says.

You also need to tailor your portfolio to the specific studio or show. “My portfolio was initially reviewed at Nickelodeon, and it was suggested to me, in order to increase one’s chances that it’s not just drawing well, but, more important, drawing within the studio or particular show’s style,” Allen says.

Study the drawing styles of shows you are pitching.

To prepare for a test, “I do a little bit of everything,” Perkins says. “For instance, when I prepared for *Ben 10*, I knew that Dave Johnson was working on the show. I looked at his comics. I

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Darrel Bowen and some of the fine character creations from his portfolio.



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Character Design

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tried to figure out how he looked at design. When I prepared for *Batman*, I looked at the myriad of references on Jeff Matsuda's style."

Bowen adds, "Watch the show, but if you know anyone on the show and have permission, get some model sheets. That's the best way to do it."

If a show is new, model sheets and other resources won't be available. Perkins says, "Look at as many sources as you can from the available animation websites. There are a wealth of Japanese model sheets available on the Internet. Even though it's a different style, it may give you a good idea."

Take the test and incorporate the show's style and your personality.

"Be meticulous and capture their style, but keep an energetic line in your drawing. A lot depends on what they ask you to do in the test. If they just want a static five-point turn, it's tough to do certain things. If they ask you to do certain expressions or poses there's more liberty to do inventive stuff," Perkins says.

You should also have fun with it.

Thomas Perkins
and his energetic
character work.



"When I took the test for *Fairly OddParents*, I really got into the characters they asked me to draw. I added a touch of humor wherever possible, including adding captions to the designs. All

these things added up to getting the job," Allen says.

Aside from testing your skills, they are also testing your professionalism. "They want to know what you're like to work with. They don't want to work with someone who may have an attitude problem," Perkins says.

Breaking into character design isn't easy, but as Allen says, "If you prepare for the test and treat it like a job," you have a great chance to succeed.

Additional Resources:

- *The Illusion of Life, Disney Animation*, by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston
- *Dynamic Anatomy*, by Burne Hogarth
- *Action Cartooning and Fantasy Cartooning*, both by Ben Caldwell
- <http://characterdesign.blogspot.com>
- www.3d.sk

Brad Manzo is a freelance journalist who lives in Brooklyn, NY. He specializes in writing articles about breaking into the different aspects of the Television industry. His writing has appeared in several magazines, including *RealScreen*, *the Writer*, and *Writer's Digest*.

Mike Allen and a
few personality-
filled samples from
his repertoire.





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Everything I Do is Art, But
Nothing I Do Makes Any
Difference,
Christopher Reilly,
The Art Institute of Chicago

Who's Teaching Machinima?

More institutes are exploring the brave new world of hacked game cinematic animation. **by Ellen Wolff**

If you've been following the rapidly evolving gaming world in the past few years, you're quite familiar with the term machinima—which is actually the merger of the two words machine and cinema. The 'machine' in this case is a video game engine, which typically is hacked to access animated characters, backgrounds and props. The hacker-turned-animation director then modifies ('mods') these elements to tell a story—like creating a personal game cinematic.

The game's POV is treated as a camera, and the 3D game environment is the virtual set. It's a real-time animation tool that's much cheaper than conventional 3D animation software. But calling the results 'cinema' is optimistic at this stage in machinima's development. Yet the potential is interesting enough to pique the interest of educators—though not at the college you might expect.

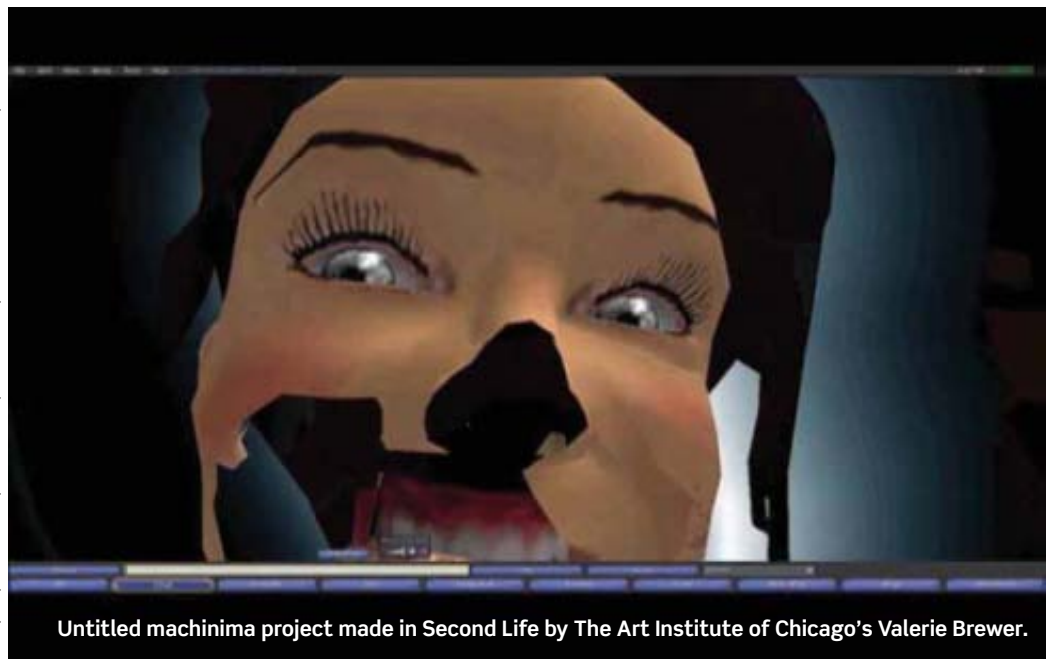
Instead of being offered at schools teaching animation and game design, machinima is showing up at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Georgia Tech and The Art Institute of Chicago. But the scarcity of classes probably won't last

long. This spring, Gnomon's Visual Effects program is offering a course in machinima, taught by CG veteran Dallas Good.

"It's just now breaching the academic world," observes Paul Marino, author of *3D Game-based Filmmaking: The Art of Machinima*. "Because it's usually people hacking game engines, the tools aren't conducive to teaching a machinima course." Nonetheless, interest exists among students. When Marino guest-lectured at MIT, Professor Beth Coleman recalls, "He filled the room."

Coleman, an artist who teaches in MIT's Comparative Media Studies program, currently leads a work/study student group that's creating a machinima film. "Students understand how it's innately exciting. It's not even a question of having a high level of resolution, or the reality of the animation. There's a generation of gamers who think it's a creative medium." Georgia Tech's Michael Nitsche agrees. Nitsche teaches regular machinima courses through the School for Literature, Communication & Culture, and he reports his courses don't just attract techno-geeks. "Our undergrads are about half classical film people, and the others are students in computational media." Part of the coursework requires students to create machinima productions, and Nitsche acknowledges

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Untitled machinima project made in Second Life by The Art Institute of Chicago's Valerie Brewer.

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Katherine Anna Kang's
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Machinima

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that's not technically easy. "We use (Epic Games') *Unreal Tournament* engine, which has a tool inside of it, but it's still painful."

That situation is changing, which may help spur machinima courses. "The guys who are developing game engines are adding tools to make it easier for machinima people," observes Brad deGraf, a pioneer in real-time CG animation. He cites id Software's John Carmack, who releases tools that permit tinkering with games like *Quake 3*. And the results, as evidenced by machinima shorts like *Anna* (from Carmack's wife, Katherine Anna Kang) resemble conventional CG films. DeGraf thinks, "She has probably done the most sophisticated authoring tools." (To link to *Anna*, and learn about Machinimation software, visit [www. FountainheadEntertainment. com](http://www.FountainheadEntertainment.com))

What's likely to attract the attention of animation educators is the first machinima film to get mass media coverage, *The French Democracy*. The 12-minute film, which chronicles first-time animator Alex Chan's response to last year's riots in France, was made quickly using a game called *The Movies*. Published by Activision and Lionhead Studios, this *Sims*-like game is actually about building a virtual studio and making movies. So it is, in essence, a machinima toolkit. Chan's movie, which he posted on the Lionhead website, became an Internet phenomenon.

One teacher who's taken note of *The Movies* is Jon Cates of the Art Institute of Chicago. Cates has taught machinima through the school's Film, Video and New Media department, primarily to upper level

students with backgrounds in media arts -- although not necessarily in animation. "*The Movies*," thinks Cates, "is a perfect example of something that's supposed to be played, but the result is that you are authoring machinima. It's innovative, and it's exciting to students."

Cates' students have also used id's *Doom* and Sierra's *Half Life*, but another choice is the *Second Life* platform—which is free. "Students are making machinima that ranges from documentary-style projects to abstract and experimental. People who are unfamiliar with the technical vocabulary of machinima may not be able to differentiate between what was 'modified' from games versus built from scratch."

Looming above machinima's future is the question of intellectual property rights, but for student projects that doesn't seem to be an issue -- yet. As MIT's Coleman notes, "Game companies have been active participants because they understand that

machinima is a creation of fan culture." Of course, if some student creates a machinima film with *Blair Witch* appeal, the legal landscape could quickly change.

But for the moment, companies are encouraging machinima by sponsoring various competitions. Blizzard has partnered with XFire, Epic Games with Nvidia, and EA sponsored a *Sims* machinima contest with USC. Marino suspects "The idea probably didn't generate from USC. The majority of USC faculty people, even if they've heard of machinima, were probably introduced to it through their students."

Cates thinks "It's interesting that serious academia, not art schools or trade schools, were in the first wave of embracing machinima." But that's likely to change, predicts both Marino and Coleman. Marino, who heads the non-profit Academy of Machinima Arts & Sciences, has been approached by UCLA Extension Studies to teach a course on machinima. He expects "There will be more calls, because machinima will enter the collective consciousness. It's really just a matter of time." ■

For more information, check out www.machinima.com and the Academy of Machinima Arts & Sciences at www.machinima.org.

June, Brian Berndt,
Georgia Tech





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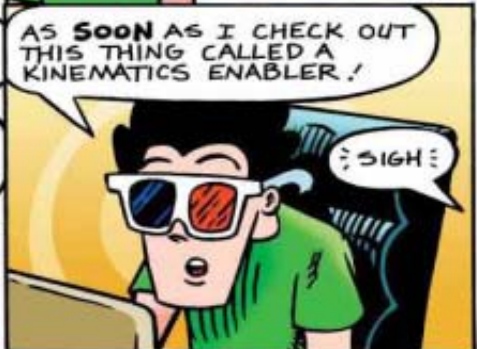
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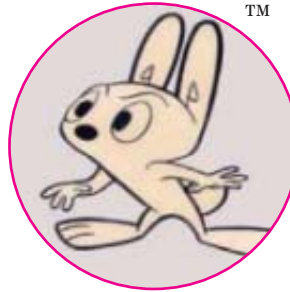
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A DAY IN THE LIFE

This month, Oscar-nominated Scottish animator **Sharon Colman** (*Badgered*) takes us along on her wild ride on the big red-carpet day in Hollywood. Although she wouldn't reveal the exact nature of her relationship with fellow Oscar-nominee George Clooney, she did provide us some exclusive photos from her glamorous life on Academy Awards day and night. (We wrote the silly captions for her!)



Badgered, Sharon's acclaimed hand-drawn short, was made for £5,000 (that's around \$8700—almost what Reese Witherspoon spent on her handbag for the evening).



Rupert Degas (the voice talent on *Badgered*) and I enjoy a stressful breakfast on the day of the big event. I tell him, "We will rule this town by next April, damn-it!"



Michelle Grismore of The Body Shop applies my make up. I warn her, "If you want to keep your job, you're going to make that Keira Knightley look like a Plain Jane standing next to me!"

Chocolate Fosca Award



Just another sunny day in L.A.: Charlotte Cooke (on my left), Daniel Greaves (Tandem Films), Rupert Degas and I wait for the limo to arrive. It'd better be as nice as Nick Park's.



The Kodak Theatre, the place to spot so many anorexic starlets and shattered dreams.



I spend a few moments to observe the habits of the entertainment-starved commoners out on the bleachers. Now I know how the Queen must feel.



Take a good look at me, you paparazzi rats. I'll make you forget all about that Jessica Simpson gal.



I am surrounded by fellow Oscar nominees in this pic: On my left, Sybil and Shane Acker (g), and to my right, Anthony and Julia Lucas (*The Mysterious Geographic Explorations of Jasper Morello*). We're on our way to the fancy Governors Ball after the big ceremony.



We phone for the limo to pick us up at the end of evening. Yes, I think I can get used to this tragic lifestyle!



Shane Acker (right) and I will not be intimidated by Aardman Studio founder David Sproxtton's orders (on my left) to give him our precious Chocolate Fosca Awards. This special annual pre-Oscar Chocolate party was hosted by Marilyn Zornado and Libby Simon at the beautiful home of animator Paul Demeyer in Silverlake.

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